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Israeli strike endangers World Health Organization director-general in Yemen

Israel launched a wave of air strikes against Yemen on Thursday, several of which struck the country's main airport, where Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was preparing to board a flight. One member of the UN airplane crew was injured, and at least six people were killed in the air raids.



A man looks at the damage in the control tower of Sana'a International Airport following Thursday's Israeli airstrikes on Yemen, Friday, Dec. 27, 2024. [AP Photo/Osamah Abdulrahman]

There are only two possible explanations for the air assault on the Yemen airport while Tedros was present there. Either Israel deliberately tried to assassinate him, or the Zionist regime was indifferent to his possible death and considered it acceptable collateral damage.

The air assault on Sanaa International Airport, where a United Nations delegation including Tedros was getting ready to leave the country, also takes place within the context of

continuous denunciations of the UN by Israel, as well as repeated military attacks on UN peacekeeping forces in Lebanon.

Speaking to Reuters, Tedros said the UN delegation was about to board a plane when the Israeli attacks began. Tedros said he was not sure he would survive when missiles struck the terminal just meters from where he was standing.

He said the explosions rocked the building and were so deafening that his ears were still ringing more than a day later.

The Reuters report continued:

Tedros said it quickly became apparent the airport was under attack, describing people “running in disarray” through the site after approximately four blasts, one of them “alarmingly” close to where he was sitting near the departure lounge.

“I was not sure actually I could survive because it was so close, a few meters from where we were,” he told Reuters. “A slight deviation could have resulted in a direct hit.”

Tedros said he and his colleagues were stuck at the airport for the next hour or so as what he thought were drones flew overhead, feeding concern they could open fire again. Among the debris, he and colleagues saw missile fragments, he said.

“There (was) no shelter at all. Nothing. So, you’re just exposed, just waiting for anything to happen,” he said.

Al Jazeera reported that the Houthi-controlled Saba news agency said three people were killed at the airport, and another three were killed after Israel hit the key port city of Hodeidah, a city on the Red Sea about 240 kilometers (149 miles) southwest of Sanaa. The news agency also reported 40 others were wounded in the Israeli attacks.

Israel’s military said it carried out “intelligence-based strikes on military targets belonging to the Houthi terrorist regime on the western coast and inland Yemen.”

Israel also claimed Sanaa airport, as well as the Hezyaz and Ras Kanatib power stations, and sites in the Al-Hudaydah, Salif and Ras Kanatib ports on the west coast, were all used to smuggle Iranian weapons and senior Iranian officials into the country.

The Al Jazeera report said Ghebreyesus and his staff were evacuated out to safety in Jordan. UN spokesperson Stephanie Tremblay told reporters in New York that the delegation had just concluded discussions on the humanitarian situation in Yemen and were negotiating the release of detained UN staff members.

Tremblay said, “The secretary-general emphasizes that international law, including humanitarian law as applicable, must be respected at all times, and he appeals to all to respect

and protect civilians and civilian infrastructure,” and added, “Humanitarian relief personnel also must not be targeted and must be respected and protected at all times.”

Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, head of the Houthis’ supreme revolutionary committee, called the strikes on Yemen “barbaric” and “aggressive.” He also said “confrontations with American and Israeli arrogance” will continue until the conflict in Gaza stops.

Responding to the escalation, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called the strikes “especially alarming.” Writing on Twitter/X, he said, “I regret the recent escalation between Yemen and Israel, and remain deeply concerned about the risk of further escalation in the region.”

The brutal strikes on Yemen, which were reported to be carried out by 25 Israeli jet fighters and coordinated by the US and UK, are a significant intensification of the imperialist war drive throughout the Middle East focused against Iran.

The escalation against Yemen follows the overthrow of the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad by the imperialist-backed and al Qaeda-linked group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)—the Organization for the Liberation of the Levant three weeks ago.

The air attack on Thursday came five days after the US conducted a series of its own precision missile strikes on facilities in the capital city of Sanaa. At the time, the US military’s central command said the purpose of the strikes was to “disrupt and degrade Houthi operations” as part of an “ongoing commitment to protect US and coalition personnel, regional partners and international shipping.”

The public relations verbiage from the Pentagon cannot conceal the fact that behind the expanding war in the Middle East—of which the Israeli genocide in Gaza is the linchpin—is the strategic goal by US imperialism to subordinate the entire region to its hegemonic interests.

In comments shortly after the strikes on Thursday, Israel’s fascist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the Zionists would “continue to cut off the terror arm of the Iranian axis of evil until we complete the job,” adding, “We are only just starting with [the Houthis].”

Iran described the strikes as a “clear violation of international peace and security.” Houthi rebels have attacked Israel since the first months of the Gaza genocide that began in October 2023. A week ago, a Houthi missile strike injured more than a dozen people in Israel.

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