Saudi Investigation Largely Defends Deadly Air Strikes in Yemen

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An investigation by a Saudi-led coalition presented on Thursday largely defended a series of deadly coalition air strikes on markets, clinics and a wedding in Yemen, citing the presence of armed militiamen at the sites.

Results of the probe, presented at a news conference in Riyadh, found that one of eight alleged mass-casualty air attacks in the second half of 2015 that it reviewed involved incomplete intelligence that led to civilian casualties.

Rights groups and witnesses told Reuters at the time of the incidents from Yemen's mountain north to coastal south said air attacks had together killed hundreds of civilians.

A Saudi-led military coalition at war with Yemen's dominant Houthi movement has said it is keen to avoid civilian casualties and uphold the laws of war.

Mansour bin Ahmed Mansour, spokesman of the Joint Group to Assess Incidents on the Saudi-Yemeni Border, said four military targets had been identified in one incident in Al Mukha in the southern Taiz province last year.

Three of the four targets were successfully attacked, he added, but the last one - a missile battery allegedly capable of attacking ships - accidentally hit a residential compound and killed several civilians.

The families of the victims were paid reparations, he added.

In another case, Mansour said that an air strike in December in Taiz, which aid group Medecins Sans Frontieres said wounded several people at one of its mobile clinics, had targeted a group of militiamen in the area.

"The result the team found was that the measures taken by the coalition forces were sound and conformed to the rules and laws of the Geneva Accords," he said.

"Reviewing this evidence, the leadership of the coalition expresses its regret for unintended incidents like this."

Mansour denied outright that a coalition air strike had been conducted on the day last September that an explosion ripped through a wedding procession in central Yemen, killing 131 people. Witnesses blamed the attack on Saudi-led jets.

The Saudi-led coalition began a military campaign in Yemen in March of last year to prevent Iranian-allied Houthi rebels and forces loyal to Yemen's ex-President Ali Abdullah Saleh from taking power.

At least 6,400 people have been killed in the conflict, according to the United Nations, around half of them civilians.