Saudi Arabia is Hit with a Drone and Missile Attack

The Saudi Arabian capital city of Riyadh was hit this week by eight drones and three ballistic missiles fired by Yemen's Houthi rebels. Saudi Arabia has often been targeted by Houthi forces during Yemen's civil war, but this is the first attack on Riyadh since March. The Houthis said the Saudi Defense Ministry and a military base were the targets of the strikes. Saudi Arabia's state news agency called the strikes "terrorist acts" and said that a Saudi-led military coalition intercepted one missile. The military base had no discernible signs of damage in the aftermath of the attack, and it is not thought that there were any civilian casualties. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are leading a coalition in Yemen fighting against the Houthis, and air strikes against targets in Saudi Arabia are not uncommon.

The civil war in Yemen has raged on since 2014, when the government of Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi was exiled from the capital by Houthi rebels. This followed Arab Spring protests in Yemen that forced longtime authoritarian leader Ali Abdullah Saleh to hand power to Hadi, who was his deputy. The Houthi rebels represent Yemen's Zaidi Shia Muslim minority, and have been prominent in Yemen for decades, having conducted periodic insurgencies against the Saleh regime. The Houthis are also widely acknowledged to be receiving support from Iran, whereas Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates lead a coalition backing the Hadi government in exile. Hadi himself resides in Saudi Arabia, and his government rules from Aden, Yemen's second largest city.

Direct combat between the Houthis and forces belonging to the Hadi government had been on pause recently, as each side respected a six-week ceasefire agreed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the attack on Riyadh indicates a resumption of hostilities by both sides. Previously, Saudi Arabia has responded to attacks by launching strikes against Houthi-controlled territory in northern Yemen. There was also fighting in southern Yemen between two factions of the anti-Houthi coalition that has helped to escalate the situation.

Yemen's civil war is widely regarded as one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes in recent memory, as both sides are complicit in indiscriminate targeting of civilians. The United Nations has verified the deaths of over 7,700 civilians since March, most of whom were killed by a Saudi air campaign. Additionally, fighting over the strategic port city of Hudaydah, which serves as a lifeline for 2/3 of Yemen's population, has resulted in a harsh famine as humanitarian relief is unable to pass through the port. Studies estimate that roughly 24 million people in Yemen need protection from the war and humanitarian assistance. In addition to this, it is believed that 2 million Yemeni children are malnourished as a result of humanitarian aid being unable to reach vulnerable people. The humanitarian disaster in Yemen has largely been ignored by the Saudi and UAE coalition, despite the situation being brought to the world's attention by the United Nations and international aid organizations.