



Armed Conflict

10

FEB

15:04 UTC

Saudi Arabia & Yemen Alert (UPDATE): Houthi military spokesperson claims UAV attack against Saudi's Abha International Airport on February 10; highlights risk to civilian infrastructure

[Click here to view previous report](#)

Please be advised:

- During the afternoon hours of February 10, the Houthi military spokesperson, Brigadier General Yahya Saree, stated that Houthi forces targeted “the airfields of warplanes” at Asir Province’s Abha International Airport, which are allegedly used for “military purposes to target the Yemeni people.”
- The spokesperson stated that the attack was conducted using four “Samad-3” and “Qasef-2K” explosive-laden unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).
- The Houthi military spokesperson further stated that the attack comes in response to the “continued aerial bombardment” and “brutal siege” by the Saudi-led Coalition in Yemen.
- Reports citing the Saudi-led Coalition during the afternoon hours of February 10 indicate that the fire caused to a civilian aircraft following the Houthi attack has been contained.
- Flight operations at Abha International Airport have reportedly resumed.
- There are no indications of casualties as a result of the incident.

Assessments & Forecast:

1. This incident comes amid occasional attempts by the Houthi forces in Yemen to conduct attacks against military and civilian infrastructure in Saudi Arabia’s southern provinces, particularly Asir, Jazan, and Najran over recent years. This includes the Abha International Airport, which is used for both domestic and international flights. For instance, on [June 12, 2019](#), a Houthi-launched missile reportedly hit Abha International Airport, which resulted in the wounding of 26 individuals. On [June 23, 2019](#), one civilian was reportedly killed and 21 others were wounded when a Houthi-launched projectile hit the facility. In this context, the current attack reflects the Houthis’ continued motive and capabilities to effectively target the Abha International Airport, located over 100 km from the Saudi-Yemeni border. This underscores the risk that such attacks pose to civilians at the site. This is further compounded by the indication that the attack damaged a civilian aircraft as well as by the fact that “Qasef-2K” UAVs were used in the attack. This is because Qasef-2K UAVs explode in the air and release shrapnel over a 30 meter diameter, which overall elevates the potential for indiscriminate, collateral damage.
2. Meanwhile, the Houthi military spokesperson’s announcement reflects the clash of narratives

between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis. While Saudi Arabia states that the Houthis target civilians, the Houthi spokesperson's statement that the attack targeted "warplanes" stationed at the airport serves to deflect potential international criticism against the Shiite-led group, and project that the Houthi forces only seek to inflict damage and casualties to military targets, rather than civilians. This is crucial for the Yemen-based movement, especially given that the new Joe Biden-led US administration is reportedly set to revoke the Houthis' designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). Thus, the Houthis' perception that the Abha International Airport is used for "military purposes to target the Yemeni people" and that the current attack is in response to the "continued aerial bombardment" and "brutal siege" by the Saudi-led Coalition, is aimed at justifying the Houthi attack.

3. Moreover, the current incident comes amid a concentrated effort by the Houthis over the past days to launch cross-border attacks towards Saudi Arabia using their arsenal of combat UAVs and ballistic missiles. This is manifested in the occurrence of at least nine such incidents since January 30 whereby the Saudi-led Coalition claimed to have downed Houthi UAVs meant to target "civilian targets" in the Kingdom's southern provinces. The increased frequency of attempted attacks likely indicates that the Houthis are currently bolstering their efforts to launch cross-border attacks towards Saudi Arabia. Such bolstered efforts may be attributed to the US President Joe Biden's February 4 announcement that Washington is terminating its support for the Saudi-led Coalition's military campaign in Yemen. In this context, as the US support has been crucial for the Saudi-led campaign, the Houthis are likely emboldened by the new development and have decided to elevate the pressure on Saudi Arabia. This is because the Houthis' primary goal remains to bring Saudi Arabia to end its military support for anti-Houthi forces as well as the Saudi-led blockade over Yemen. **FORECAST:** Thus, the Houthi forces are likely to seek to carry out further attacks against strategic targets within Saudi Arabia over the coming days, particularly against airports in Asir, Najran, and Jazan.
4. _: Due to the continued threat posed by the Houthis on civilian and sensitive infrastructure, the Saudi security forces will likely seek to bolster their security protocols and deploy additional resources to mitigate the threat from such attacks. Nonetheless, the latest attack will likely embolden the Shiite group to conduct additional UAVs and ballistic missiles at strategic and civilian targets in Saudi Arabia's southern provinces over the coming weeks and months. Moreover, given the Shiite-led group's known possession of long-range ballistic and cruise missiles, attempts by the Houthis to carry out attacks further deep within Saudi territory, including major cities such as Riyadh or Jeddah, is possible. The Iran-backed group has proven its ability to reach such distances from their held territory in Yemen. Overall, the risk posed to civilian infrastructure by such Houthi-perpetrated attacks in Saudi Arabia will continue to remain high, particularly in the bordering provinces with Yemen, where this threat is more acute.

Recommendations:

1. Travel to Riyadh, Dammam, and Jeddah can continue as normal while adhering to basic security precautions and adherence to cultural norms.
2. Maintain heightened vigilance in central areas in major cities, including popular public areas and shopping centers, as well as Western institutions and places frequented by Westerners.
3. It is further advised to avoid all travel to the border areas with Yemen, specifically Asir, Najran, and Jazan provinces due to the potential for collateral damage emanating from the near-daily Houthi-perpetrated cross-border hostilities in the region.