

**From:** FCO Arabian Peninsula and Iran Department (APID)

**Sent:** 15 January 2016 15:58

**To:** Private Office

**Subject:** FS Update - Yemen

[REDACTED]

There is some interest in the FS' response on Yemen at this week's orals. Our advice below (in the form of an update) has been agreed with Press Office, Legal Advisors and MOD.

Thanks

[REDACTED]

**Yemen/ IHL:** A number of NGOs (and some international media) have picked up on the Foreign Secretary's response to Hilary Benn's question on Yemen at FCO Orals on Tuesday. They have misconstrued this as an admission that the UK is directly involved in the Saudi targeting process, including the provision of coordinates to KSA. [REDACTED] we recommend deploying strengthened press lines (below) to correct any misinterpretations of the UK position.

Updated press lines:

- We are offering advice and training to Saudi Arabia to demonstrate best practice in IHL-compliant processes, to help ensure continued compliance with IHL.
- It is important that Saudi Arabia has access to the latest best practice on IHL-compliant processes to best ensure that only legitimate military targets are targeted.
- Liaison officers are not involved in actual targeting decisions or processes, or in directing or conducting operations in Yemen.
- For security reasons we clearly do not comment on the specific numbers or locations of our personnel.

Hansard transcript:

**Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab):** All our thoughts are with those killed and injured in what the Foreign Secretary has just reported as a terrorist attack in Istanbul. The conflict in Yemen between the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition has so far claimed over 7,000 lives and has created, in the words of the UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator, Johannes van der Klaauw, a "humanitarian catastrophe", with more than 2.5 million people internally displaced and 7.5 million people without enough food. Last week, Sky News reported that six British personnel are advising the Saudis on targeting in connection with the conflict. Will the Foreign Secretary tell us exactly what assistance these individuals are giving, and, if it is related to targeting, whether they have reported any potential breaches of international humanitarian law?

**Mr Philip Hammond:** The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I cannot tell him whether it is six people, but we do have a military presence in Saudi Arabia, and we are working with the Saudi Arabians to ensure the following of correct procedures to avoid breaches of international humanitarian law—to ensure that target sets are correctly identified and processes correctly followed and that only legitimate military targets are struck. It is important that we ensure Saudi Arabia has that capability.

We also use the personnel who are present as a quick check—it can only be a quick first check—when we receive reports, as we have recently, of breaches of international humanitarian law that would, for example, involve the deliberate striking of civilian targets. So far, in every case, our people on the ground have reported that there is no evidence of deliberate breaches of international humanitarian law.

**[REDACTED]** Arabian Peninsula and Iran Department | Foreign and Commonwealth Office | WH.3.140, King Charles Street, London SW1A 2AH [REDACTED]