

British Bombs Are Being Dropped from Saudi Jets onto Yemeni Schools, Mosques and Hospitals, Court Hears

Campaign Against Arms Trade challenges Sajid Javid's decision not to suspend bomb sales to Saudi Arabia in the Court of Appeal

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A Yemeni city the size of Cambridge had just hours to evacuate before it was pummelled by Saudi war planes, the Court of Appeal in London heard today.

A panel of judges is reviewing a decision made by Sajid Javid not to suspend British bomb sales for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen.

The Tory high-flier was business secretary when he allowed the arms exports to keep flowing, despite his head of export control warning that "my gut tells me we should suspend."

Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) challenged Mr Javid's decision unsuccessfully at the High Court in 2017 but later lodged an appeal.

The group said an "enormous" quantity of British bombs is being dropped from Saudi jets onto Yemeni schools, mosques and hospitals as a result of Mr Javid giving a green light to the arms industry.

CAAT's lawyer Martin Chamberlain QC said entire cities have been targeted by indiscriminate Saudi-led air strikes.

In the case of Sa'ada, a city with around 100,000 residents, Mr Chamberlain said:

"Leaflets were dropped one or two hours before the bombardment started, but a large proportion of that town were illiterate — they couldn't read the leaflets.

"There was an announcement on radio some four or five hours before — but what were they to do?

"Many had no petrol — and they were being told the whole city was a target."

More than 200 strikes on the city swiftly followed.

"To declare an entire city the size of Cambridge to be a military target is the most flagrant breach of international humanitarian law one can imagine," he

said.

“It’s like saying Cambridge is a military target — the whole of it.

“What are civilians to do?”

He also highlighted a missile strike on a Medecins Sans Frontieres hospital in Yemen, which killed an aid worker, and the Great Hall incident in capital Sana’a which was a “double tap attack” with missiles “fired at first responders who went to the aid of those injured in the first attack.”

He then lambasted the government, asking:

“What did the Secretary of State think about that? We have no idea.”

The appellant claims that government ministers have not “bothered” to rationally assess the impact of Saudi air strikes on Yemen when considering whether there was a “clear risk” that British bombs could be used to commit war crimes — the threshold required to halt arms deals.

CAAT is bringing the challenge against the Department for International Trade, which now oversees arms export licences.

Oxfam, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International are among other parties intervening in the case, which is scheduled to run for three days.

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Featured image: Campaigners outside the Royal Courts of Justice, London ahead of a three-day legal challenge over the British government’s exports of arms to Saudi Arabia, today (April 9)

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