



SAM
Rights & Liberties



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Shattered Remains in the Dark Corner

An Investigative Report Documenting the Killing of Five Children in Taiz

Who are we?

SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties

SAM is an independent, non-profit Yemeni human rights organization that began its activities in January 2016 and obtained a license to operate in December 2017. The organization aims to document human rights violations in Yemen, work to stop violations through advocacy in partnership with local and international organizations, raise human rights awareness through societal rights development, and hold human rights violators accountable in Yemen in collaboration with international mechanisms and human rights organizations.





Open-Source Investigations Unit – SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties | July 2025

Incident: Shell explosion in Al-‘Ursum, Taiz

Date: July 11, 2025

Victims: Five children killed, several other civilians injured

Controlling party in the area: Houthi group

Introduction

On the evening of Friday, July 11, 2025, the densely populated neighborhood of Al-'Ursum, located in the Al-Ta'iziyah District of Taiz Governorate, witnessed a violent explosion that resulted in the deaths of several children and injuries to others. This tragic incident occurred in a highly sensitive security environment, as the area regularly experiences military activity and is entirely under the control of the Houthi group, placing the event within the scope of their direct administrative and logistical responsibility.

The explosion provoked widespread outrage but also opened a wide range of legal and technical questions regarding the circumstances surrounding it, the nature of the projectile used, and the party that could be held directly accountable.

Amid the mutual accusations exchanged by the warring factions, the truth is obscured by layers of denial and political exploitation, complicating efforts to arrive at an accurate account of what truly happened in Al-'Ursum. While each side hastens to blame the other without offering reliable technical evidence, the memory of the victims is at risk of being erased, and the tragedy of the children becomes a new battleground for media conflict. In such a charged atmosphere, the urgent need arises for an independent and impartial investigation—one that restores the facts rather than inflames rhetoric, and gives the victims a narrative grounded in justice rather than political one-upmanship.

Naturally, the process of directly documenting the incident faced severe field-related complications, given that the explosion occurred in an area under Houthi control. This situation prevented independent teams from accessing the blast site or conducting a neutral on-ground investigation. Despite the organization's efforts to obtain testimonies from local residents, the available statements were scarce and limited, lacking the essential details necessary to construct an accurate picture of the incident's sequence of events.

Due to this severe shortage of direct information, the organization was compelled to rely on open sources—images, videos, and publicly available analyses—in an attempt to deconstruct the timeline of the crime and understand what happened to the child victims, without allowing the truth to be lost in the maze of mutual blame or systematic political exploitation.

The Incident

At precisely 6:30 p.m. on Friday, July 11, 2025, an explosion occurred in the middle of the Al-'Ursum neighborhood, where a group of children were playing near their homes. The blast tore their bodies apart, caused severe injuries, and damaged part of the surrounding residential infrastructure. The incident took place at a time when no direct clashes or shelling were reported in the area, making the explosion sudden in both timing and context.

The Victims

The explosion resulted in the deaths of five children from the Al-'Ursum neighborhood, aged between twelve and fourteen. Among the victims were:

- **Osama Abu Bakr Ahmed Ali**, 12 years old
- **Mubarak Yasser Ali Al-Shara'bi**, 14 years old
- **Basheer Akram Mohammed Al-Fadhli**, 13 years old
- **Anas Jawad Mohammed Saleh**, 14 years old
- **Ahmed Ali Muqbil Al-'Otmi**, who was not yet 12 years old

All of them died instantly as a result of the explosion.

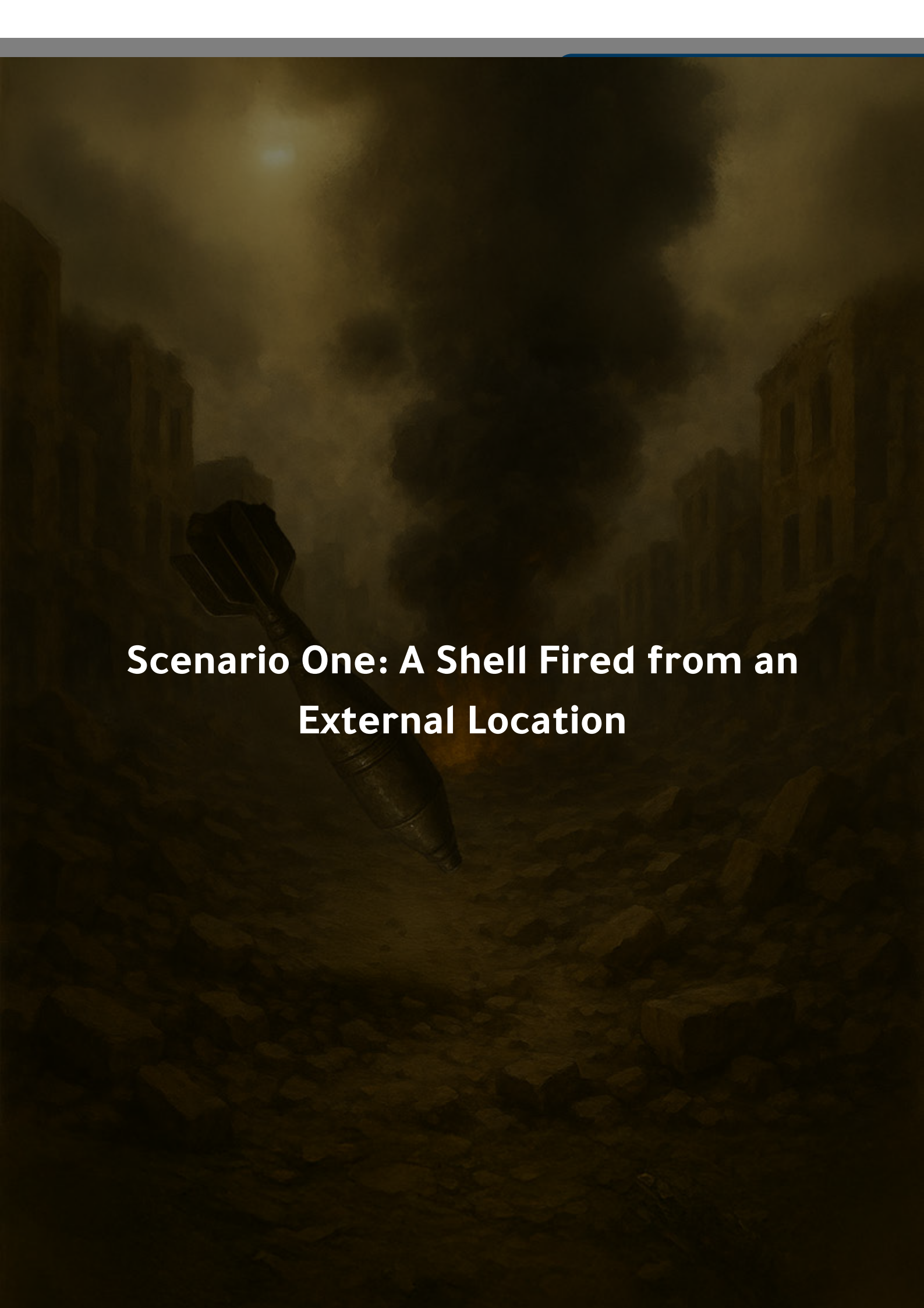


Names and Photos of the Child Victims (as shared on social media)

Conflicting Scenarios: Which Is Closer to the Truth?

Multiple narratives have emerged regarding the nature of the explosion that claimed the lives of five children in the Al-'Ursum neighborhood. The scenarios vary between a direct accusation against government forces for allegedly launching a shell from the Asifrah area, and a counter-narrative suggesting that the explosion was caused by remnants of a previous projectile within the neighborhood. This contradiction necessitates examining each scenario based on its technical aspects, the presumed launch site, and the type of weapon used, in order to reach a conclusion based on field facts rather than the propaganda of either party.





Scenario One: A Shell Fired from an External Location

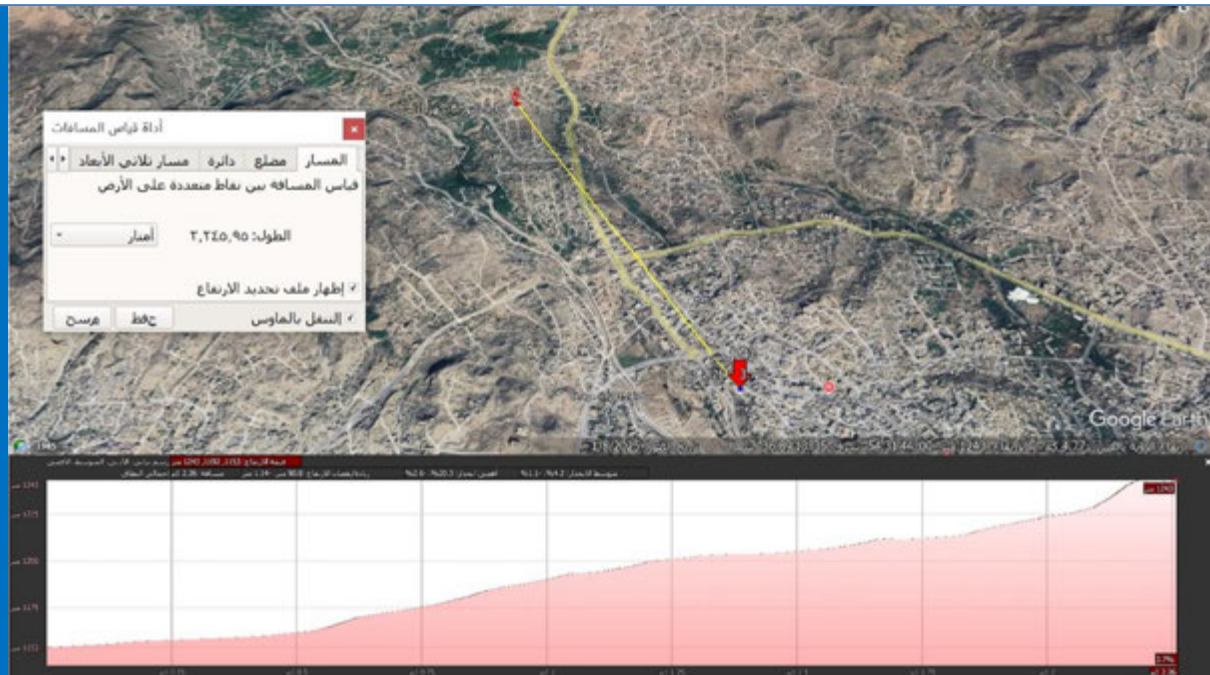
According to footage and eyewitness testimonies broadcast by ["Al-Masirah"](#) channel, affiliated with the Houthi group, the shell that exploded in Al-'Ursum was a conventional 82mm mortar round, which has a maximum range of 3,040 meters according to standard military data.



(Screenshot showing remnants of an 82mm mortar round (Al-Masirah Channel)

These technical details take on particular importance when evaluating the testimonies presented by Al-Masirah, where three individuals claimed that the shell was launched from the government complex in the Asifrah area, under the control of government forces.

Based on topographic data, the distance between the alleged launch point and the impact site in Al-'Ursum is estimated at 2,245 meters, with a height difference of 109 meters in favor of the launch site. These figures place the distance within the effective range of an 82mm mortar shell, which does not exceed 3,034 meters under ideal conditions. The elevation difference here provides the projectile with additional capability to cover the distance without requiring ammunition modifications or advanced types.



Map showing the distance between the impact site and the alleged launch location

Theoretically, this scenario is technically plausible, as the elevation difference reduces the propulsion requirements and allows the necessary distance to be achieved while maintaining a high angle of descent. In this case, according to approximate ballistic trajectory calculations, the descent angle would likely range between 70 to 75 degrees—a steep angle expected to produce a symmetrical blast pattern, a relatively vertical crater, and a circular distribution of shrapnel and debris around the impact site, according to a military expert who spoke to SAM.

However, despite this scenario being physically possible, its assessment remains incomplete without an actual field inspection of the explosion site. A technical examination of the impact scene must confirm that the crater's shape, penetration angle, and fragmentation pattern are consistent with the expected trajectory characteristics. Any significant deviation in the angle of impact or the peripheral damage pattern may not necessarily negate the launch scenario, but it would weaken its reliability and raise questions requiring specialized analysis. Based on this, acceptance of this scenario should remain conditional upon a genuine site-specific analysis—one that is not based solely on theoretical calculations but on the alignment of physical data with on-the-ground reality.

Although the narrative adopted by Al-Masirah relied on local testimonies, some of these statements raise serious doubts about their credibility. Three witnesses featured in the report claimed that the shell was launched from the government complex in the Asifrah area—a highly precise geographic determination that is difficult to assert by non-specialist civilians. Identifying the source of a mortar shell in a complex urban environment requires technical expertise and acoustic or visual analysis tools that ordinary citizens do not possess. Even if the general direction could be gauged through sound or flash, pinpointing the exact launch location with such accuracy is implausible, suggesting the witnesses may have been pre-briefed or coached to deliver this version of events, especially in the absence of any supporting technical analysis.

Moreover, it is notable that Al-Masirah did not present any continuous or panoramic footage showing the shell's impact angle or its orientation in relation to surrounding buildings or terrain. This omission weakens the evidentiary value of the claim, particularly since the angle of impact is a key technical indicator of the launch direction and could be a decisive factor in substantiating one account over another. Therefore, the failure to include such details in the media coverage—despite their ease of documentation in the field—constitutes a gap in the narrative presentation and underscores the need for an impartial, technical field investigation based on objective on-site data rather than potentially guided or interpreted testimonies.

Scenario Two: Unexploded Ordnance



This scenario assumes that the explosion which killed the children in Al-'Ursum was not caused by a freshly launched projectile from an external location but rather resulted from a pre-existing munition within the area, known as "unexploded ordnance" (UXO). This term refers to munitions or explosive devices that failed to detonate during initial use or were deliberately or accidentally left in populated areas following a military withdrawal or prior field use.

In practical terms, this hypothesis gains a degree of validity considering the nature of the conflict in Yemen, where incidents caused by the presence of UXO in or near residential areas are frequent—whether from landmines, unexploded shells, or the use of inhabited neighborhoods as launch or storage zones for military materials.

Given that the Al-'Ursum area is under the control of the Houthi group, this places an added responsibility on them to ensure civilian safety by removing hidden military hazards, including clearing unexploded ordnance and decontaminating locations previously used for combat purposes.

Although this scenario does not automatically absolve any party in the conflict, it offers an alternative explanation for an explosion that was not preceded by visual confirmation of an incoming shell. It also aligns with the broader security context in which the possibility of leftover munitions in the area becomes a hypothesis worth technical examination.

This hypothesis is supported by several indicators outlined below:

Injuries as a Signature of the Explosive Device

Upon reviewing images of the child victims, it is evident that injuries were primarily concentrated in the lower limbs, involving full amputations or severe trauma. This injury pattern is inconsistent with that of a falling mortar shell, which typically produces a wide circular blast zone with injuries to the head, chest, and limbs simultaneously. Therefore, the concentration of injuries in the legs—without corresponding trauma to the upper body—suggests that the explosion occurred at a very low level or in close proximity to the victims, at a distance shorter than what was depicted in the footage aired by Al-Masirah, where the alleged shell's impact site appeared to be over six meters away from the victims' location.

This supports the theory that the explosion was caused by an explosive device on or embedded in the ground—such as a war remnant or an improvised

explosive device (IED). This type of detonation produces a localized, directional impact, explaining the specific tissue damage without widespread shrapnel dispersion. Accordingly, the anatomical pattern of the injuries undermines the scenario of a falling shell from a distant location and strengthens the hypothesis of a ground-level detonation, warranting a precise forensic examination of the explosion site and its immediate effects.

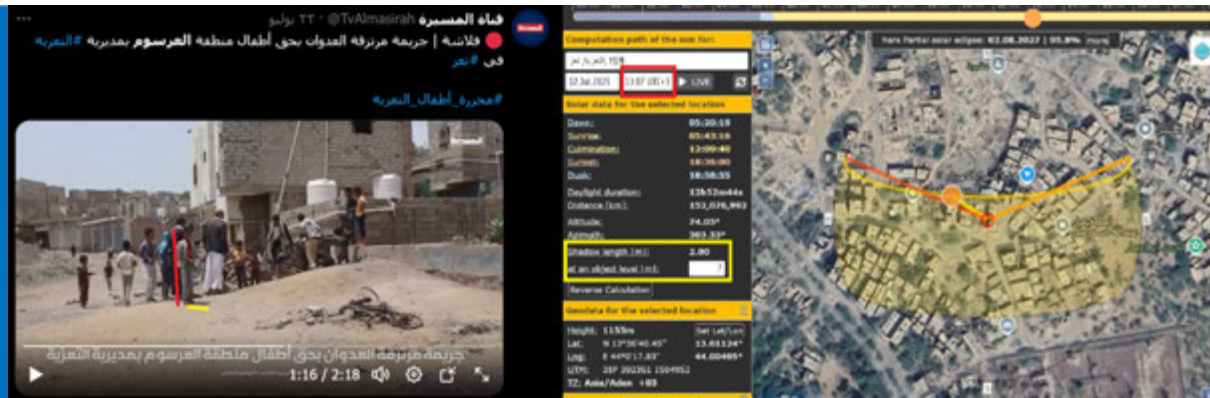


Remains of the child victims of the projectile explosion (Social Media)

Possible Tampering with the Explosion Site

In the aftermath of the explosion initial [footage](#) emerged documenting the immediate moments following the blast. Notably, those early scenes, recorded right after the explosion, did not show the presence of any crater in the ground—an essential physical marker expected when a shell detonates upon impact with a solid or earthen surface.

It is evident that footage showing the explosion crater did not appear until the following day, a detail confirmed by the shadows visible in the published video. The direction and length of the shadows (with a shadow-to-height ratio of approximately 2:7) indicate that the recording took place around 1:00 PM, on a different day than the explosion. This notable delay raises serious questions about why there was no immediate documentation of the crater, whether in the final daylight hours of the incident day or during the evening—especially considering that the nature of the event—the killing of children—would typically prompt urgent on-site documentation.



A screenshot showing the time of video recording based on shadow direction and length

What is even more striking is the statement made by one of the witnesses in a report broadcast by [Al-Masirah](#) channel, who said verbatim: “We dug and extracted the projectile’s fin.” This statement explicitly undermines any claim that the visible crater resulted directly from the explosion itself. Rather, it clearly indicates that the tail section was not visible on the surface at the time of the explosion but was instead retrieved later after the ground was excavated. This contradicts the natural scenario of a mortar shell explosion, where the projectile typically fragments and scatters due to pressure and shrapnel force, rather than remaining embedded in a single spot where it could be retrieved hours later.

Furthermore, the tail of the projectile shown in the final images appears to be lodged at an angle and located at the edge of a crater that lacks any of the symmetrical characteristics of an actual detonation—such as peripheral fragmentation, scorched earth, or peeling of the surrounding surface at the impact point.



Image showing the projectile's position in relation to the crater, with no visible soil displacement in the forward area

Lack of Immediate Coverage

In addition to the visual and field inconsistencies that undermined the Houthi group's narrative regarding the Al-'Ursum explosion, a striking time gap in media coverage raises further legitimate questions about how consistent the event is with the account presented by the party claiming to be the victim.

Although the explosion that killed five children occurred shortly before sunset, the first media coverage by Houthi-affiliated outlets was delayed by more than two hours. [Al-Masirah](#) TV, the group's official channel, did not issue any urgent news or post until 7:49 PM.

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المسيرة - عاجل
@Almasirahbrk

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مرتقة العدوان على منازل المواطنين في منطقة العرسوم بمديرية التعزية

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This delay—despite the gravity of the incident and its apparent nature as a “massacre of children in an area under the group’s control”—raises serious questions about why the report was not released sooner, especially given that the official narrative claimed it was a direct shelling by government forces.

In the normal context of field events, particularly those that are used for media mobilization to condemn an external party, it is expected that the affected side would rush to publish and document the incident immediately—especially in a media environment accustomed to issuing breaking news and distributing images within minutes. However, the conspicuous delay in reporting, along with the absence of any direct documentation of the explosion or its immediate aftermath, may suggest a state of temporary confusion in responding to the unexpected incident—or perhaps a time gap required to reconstruct a coherent media narrative before disseminating it to the public.

Controlling The Narrative

It is also notable that the [first](#) party to report on the incident was “Al-Masirah Urgent,” the Houthi group’s breaking news outlet, with no prior posts or comments observed from local residents or eyewitnesses on social media or digital platforms before that time.



This stands out as particularly unusual, especially considering that the incident was tragic and severe, involving the deaths of children in a residential area—a type of event that typically triggers spontaneous public reactions and immediate documentation on local platforms.

Therefore, the absence of any direct grassroots documentation may indicate a degree of control over the narrative within the local community and supports the possibility that the Houthi group imposed silence on residents or prevented immediate publication. This would serve to delay the flow of information, allowing time to present a media account aligned with the group's political and military objectives.

The time gap between the explosion and the recording of the crater, the inconsistencies in footage regarding the crater's presence or absence, along with the witness's statement about "extracting the projectile's fin after digging," are all elements that undermine the Houthi narrative about the nature of the explosion. Collectively, they open the strong possibility that what was presented was not a re-documentation of the explosion, but a reconstruction of the incident scene aimed at directing political and media accusations toward government forces.

Conclusion

When read collectively, these circumstances do not fully exonerate any party. However, they strongly reinforce the urgent need to initiate an independent technical field investigation—one grounded in a factual analysis of the actual explosion site, not of the scene as later filmed. This includes identifying the type of explosive used, assessing the characteristics of the original crater—if any—and comparing all this with the resulting human impact and the degree to which it aligns with the narrative of either party to the conflict.

In light of the available data, field observations, and contradictions within the official account, the Al-'Ursum tragedy remains an open wound in the body of absent justice. The continued obstruction of an independent investigation, suppression of evidence, and exploitation of suffering for political purposes constitute an additional violation of the victims' rights and the community's memory. Unless the incident is addressed as a crime requiring accountability, impunity will remain the norm—not the exception.

Recommendations:

The report strongly recommends launching an independent, impartial technical field investigation led by a team of experts in weaponry, forensic science, and field investigation. This team should examine the actual explosion site, analyze the nature of the field impact, damage patterns, and shrapnel dispersion, and determine the projectile's direction based solely on physical evidence—not media reports or unverified narratives.

The report also calls for a detailed geographic survey of areas surrounding the explosion site within a radius of no less than three kilometers, along with an analysis of the area's topographic features, potential firing angles, and line-of-sight visibility between opposing positions, in order to verify the plausibility of claims that accuse government forces.

Among the core recommendations is the collection of all metallic fragments and remains of the projectile at the explosion scene, to be subjected to specialized laboratory analysis. This would help identify the origin of manufacture, the type of materials used, and whether the weapon belongs to a formal arsenal or has been locally modified—thus potentially linking the ammunition to a specific party.

The report also stresses the necessity of conducting independent field interviews with neighborhood residents, especially those present near the incident. These interviews must be carried out by a neutral party, under safe conditions that protect witnesses from any potential pressure or threats, while taking into account the concerns of civilians living under a military authority that may be a party to the conflict.

For civilian protection, the report underscores the importance of halting the use of residential areas as training zones or firing positions by any side, given the direct threat this poses to civilian lives, particularly those of children. The controlling party in the area must urgently remove any unexploded ordnance and publish warning maps or educational alerts to prevent recurrence of such tragedies.

The report also urges relief and human rights organizations, as well as UN agencies specializing in child protection, to intervene immediately to provide psychological, medical, and financial support to the victims' families, and to

help the community cope with the trauma through emergency programs commensurate with the human damage caused.

Lastly, the report recommends including this incident in periodic reports monitoring violations of international humanitarian law, particularly those documenting offenses against children in armed conflicts. Children are the most vulnerable and most frequently targeted group in unsafe environments—making it imperative for the international community to take serious action to reduce the recurrence of such crimes.



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