

## Saudi airforce hits rebels in Yemen-Saudi website

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The Saudi air force is attacking rebel strongholds in northern Yemen after rebels killed two Saudi security men on the border, the Saudi-owned, London-based Elaph website reported

There was no immediate official confirmation from Riyadh or the Yemeni capital Sanaa.

Elaph, in an unsourced report monitored by the BBC, said Saudi ground forces were also moving towards the border area, but did not say any troops had crossed into Yemen.

The Shi'ite rebels, known as Houthis after the family of their leader, have previously accused Saudi Arabia of backing Yemen's armed forces in the conflict. Sanaa had denied this.

The Houthis said on their website late on Wednesday that Saudi planes had struck four locations using phosphorus bombs.

Saudi Arabia said on Wednesday one security officer was killed and 11 were wounded in an attack by unidentified gunmen in an area near the Yemeni border which the rebels said they had seized in a cross-border raid.

Elaph said another soldier had died later from the same clash, which it said occurred on Tuesday night near the village of al-Khawbah in the Jizan region.

Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, has become increasingly anxious about the conflict raging since August in neighbouring Yemen, which is also facing separatist sentiment in the south and a growing threat from al Qaeda militancy.

The rebels also said on Wednesday they had taken control of the Jabal al-Dukhan area after defeating Saudi forces there.

Saudi Arabia was allowing the Yemeni army to use the mountainous area to launch attacks against them and they would take action if this continued, the rebels said.

Reporting the cross-border raid, the official Saudi news agency said gunmen fired on Saudi patrols in Jabal al-Dukhan town, killing one security officer and wounding 11.

The 1,500 km (930 miles) border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia is a security worry for the kingdom, which is building a high-tech border fence to prevent infiltration.

Saudi Arabia and the United States fear the conflict in Yemen's north and a separatist movement in the south will enable al Qaeda to establish a stronger foothold in Yemen.

Such fears were compounded in August, when a suicide bomber posing as a repentant al Qaeda militant tried to kill the kingdom's counter-terrorism chief after coming from Yemen.

Arab countries allied to the United States, such as predominantly Sunni Muslim Saudi Arabia and Egypt, fear Shi'ite power Iran could gain influence in Yemen through the rebels.

Yemen's army launched Operation Scorched Earth in August to crush the rebellion. Aid groups say around 150,000 people have been displaced by the fighting, which first broke out in 2004.

The rebels say they are fighting political, economic and religious marginalisation by Yemen's central government.

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