

The Runway, Again

A terminal is people: twelve killed, 309 wounded, and every one of them counted.

By Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · Sunday 11 October 2026

On Thursday, 8 October, we wrote that a runway is people. That same Thursday, King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh was hit again. On Saturday afternoon, 10 October, it was hit once more, its second hit in three days, and the deadliest of the week.

Thursday first, because its cost is now on the record. Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation said on Friday, 9 October, that two attacks on the airport on Thursday, one on airport facilities and one on a Saudia aircraft parked on the ground, killed three Saudi citizens and wounded people of several nationalities. Saudia named one of the dead: Captain Hamoud Ali al-Kalthami, one of its pilots. No passengers were aboard the aircraft. The authority again did not say who fired. The Houthis claimed an attack on the airport that day. These three deaths come on top of the three the same authority reported for Abha and Riyadh on 6 and 7 October. That made six people killed in one week at civilian airports before Saturday, by the Saudi authority's own count.

Then Saturday. The aviation authority first said the airport was targeted on Saturday afternoon, that several people were injured with "the number still being assessed," and that operations were suspended pending a full damage assessment. Early on Sunday it gave the count: 12 killed, four Saudi citizens and eight foreign nationals (two from Bangladesh and one each from the United States, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Palestine and Sudan), and 309 injured, some of them in critical condition, as reported by AP, the BBC and the Saudi Gazette. With Thursday's three and the three killed at Abha and Riyadh on 6 and 7 October, that is 18 people killed at civilian airports in one week, by the authority's own statements. Saudi officials told the Wall Street Journal that Terminal 3 took a direct hit and was evacuated, with injuries. A regional official told AP that a missile struck the complex that houses Terminals 3 and 4, the domestic terminals. Flights were diverted or cancelled, and AP, citing FlightAware, counted at least 291 cancellations at the airport over 24 hours. The United States, Britain, Germany, Australia and Canada told their citizens to stay away.

The count has come, and we report it at its full weight. On who fired, we will be exact. The aviation authority's statement assigns no blame. The spokesman of the Saudi-led coalition, Maj. Gen. Turki al-Maliki, in a statement carried by the Saudi Press Agency, called the attack a terrorist act by the Houthi militia and a war crime, and vowed a firm response. The Houthis have not commented on Saturday, though they claimed the earlier attacks this week and have warned airlines away from Saudi airspace. That is a Saudi official attribution, not a claim by the attackers, and we will not add to it with a rumour or a guess.

Three things follow.

First, a terminal is people too. A domestic terminal on a Saturday afternoon holds families going home and workers going to their shifts. Whoever aims at the building is aiming at them.

Second, a pattern is not a proof. The same airport was struck on Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday, and the obvious conclusion about Saturday was not ours to draw. It waited for the people whose job it is to say it, and on Saturday night a Saudi official said it.

Third, a missing number was never a small number. “Several, still being assessed” was an honest sentence for an authority to write on the first night. By Sunday morning it had become 12 killed and 309 wounded, some critically, from eight nationalities. The authority has given their nationalities, not yet their names. Each one is a seat someone will notice is empty.

Saturday was Shabbat Bereishit, and it fell on the eve of Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan. The haftarah for such a Shabbat has Yonatan telling David, “Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed, for your seat will be empty” (Shmuel I 20:18). The Hebrew for “you will be missed,” *venifkadta*, comes from the same root as counting. To be missed is to be counted by someone who notices the empty seat. That counting is the work in front of Riyadh now: twelve empty seats, and 309 people in hospital care. Our smaller share of it was to wait for the count, and now to say it.

May G-d heal the 309 wounded of Riyadh, comfort the family of Captain Hamoud Ali al-Kalthami, the families of the twelve killed on Saturday, and the families of all who were killed this week, and guard all who travel, by air and by sea.

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