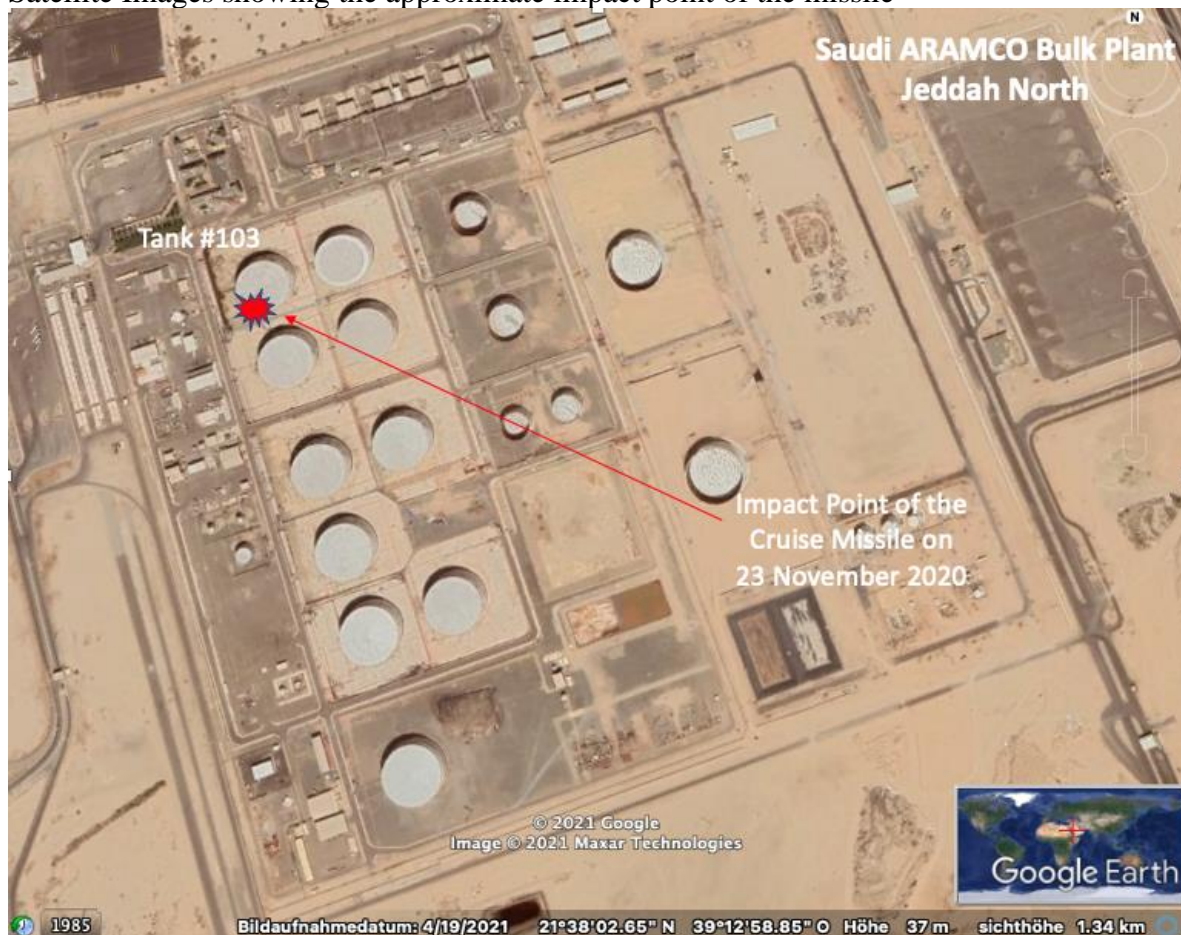


Annex 16 Attack on the Saudi Aramco Bulk Plant in Jeddah North

17. At 0342 hours in the early morning of 23 November 2020, the Saudi Aramco petroleum products distribution facility in Jeddah North was attacked by a cruise missile, which hit the top of storage tank #103 coming from a South-Westerly direction. One of 13 similar structures at the site used to store petroleum products such as diesel oil, gasoline and jet fuel. The tank has a capacity of 500,000 barrels and was filled with diesel at the time of the attack. The attack caused an explosion and a subsequent fire in the attack, the burn marks of which were still clearly visibly during the Panel's visit to the facility in June 2021 and it took the company's response team and the fire brigade about 40 minutes to extinguish the fire. Subsequent investigations showed that the impact of the missile had created a hole of 3.93 meters x 2.56 meters in the external roof of the storage tank and had completely destroyed the floating internal roof, a six-millimeter-thick structure made of carbon steel on top of the product. Company representatives interviewed by the Panel confirmed that there had been no advance warning of an attack.

Figure 16.1

Satellite Images showing the approximate impact point of the missile



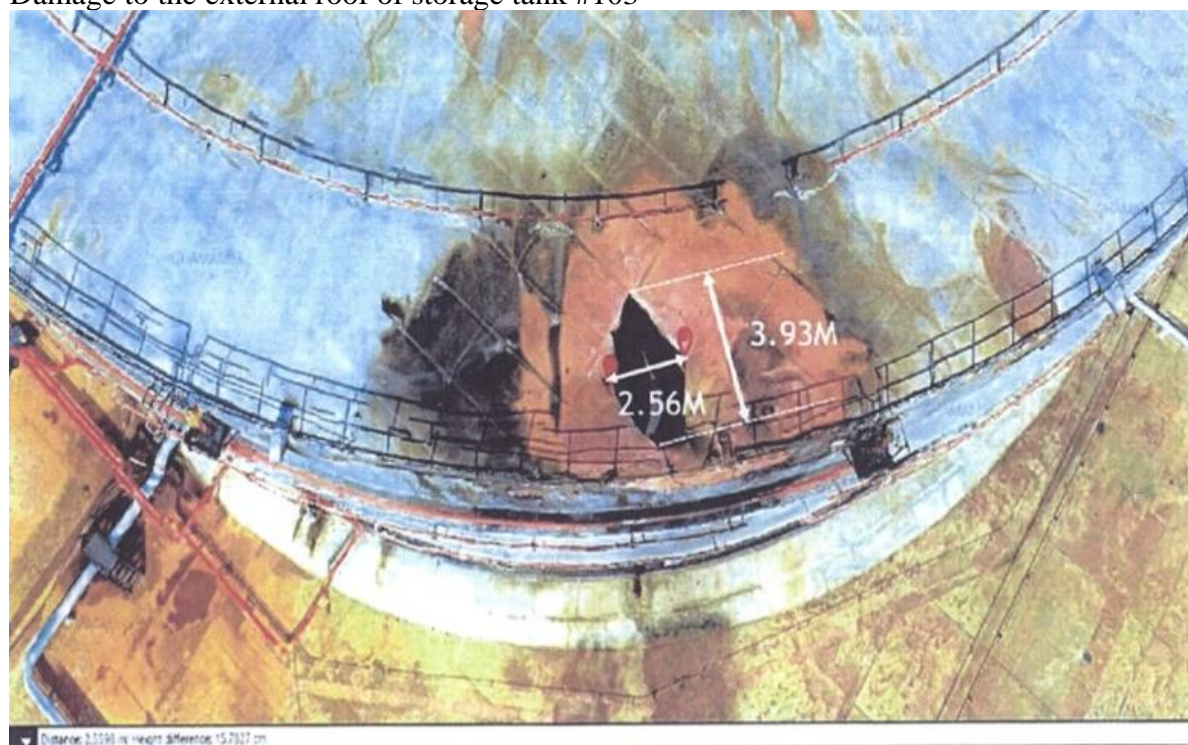
Source: Google Earth, Panel

18. Shortly after the attack, a spokesman for the Houthi forces, brigadier general Yahya Sarie, announced in the Houthi-affiliated media that “the Yemeni missile forces targeted an Aramco

distribution station in Jeddah with a winged missile, Quds 2, which is announced for the first time”²¹³. On the same day, in a letter to the President of the Security Council ([S/2020/1135](#)), the Permanent Representative of KSA also attributed responsibility for the “terrorist attack” on the bulk plant to the Houthi militia. The Panel also notes that the modus operandi of the attack, despite more limited in scale, is broadly like the previous attacks on the oil infrastructure in KSA, including the high-profile attack on 14 September 2019 on the Aramco facilities in Abqaiq and Khurays ([S/2020/326](#)).

Figure 16.2

Damage to the external roof of storage tank #103



Source: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

19. While operations at the Bulk Plant resumed within hours of the attack, storage tank #103 was out of service for about four months for repairs, which according to the company cost it approximately USD 1.5 million. Even though there were 15 employees of Saudi Aramco at the site when the attack happened, no injuries occurred. However, had the missile hit another storage tank containing a more flammable fuel than diesel oil (such as kerosene), it is possible that the tank’s firefighting system would not have been able to contain the blaze and that other tanks in the facility would have also been affected. The Panel believes that the missile system used by the Houthis in this attack (see paragraph 5 below) is sufficiently precise that storage tank #103 was deliberately targeted, but it not clear whether the attackers were aware what kind of fuel was stored there at the time of the attack.

20. According to information received by the Panel during its visit to the facility, the North Jeddah Bulk Plant has a total storage capacity of 5.2 billion barrels and plays a critical role in distributing up to 120,000 barrels of refined petroleum products per day to customers in the Jeddah, Mecca and al-Baha regions, which accounts for 25 to 30 percent of the Kingdom’s supplies. In addition to more than 1,000 petrol stations, the facility also supplies public utilities such as the King Abdulaziz International

²¹³ <http://en.yagency.net/198784/>.

Airport in Jeddah, the Saudi Electricity Company and the vital Saline Water Conversion Corporation, which is responsible for the provision of most potable water in the Jeddah region. While the facility also supplies the Saudi military with petroleum products, it is mostly supplying civilian customers. If the plant had been out of service of a significant period, the impact on the Kingdom's economy as well as on the welfare of the residents of the Western region would likely have been significant.

Figure 16.3

Debris of the cruise missile used in the attack



Source: Panel

21. The Panel has been able to inspect the debris of the missile used in the attack and was informed that some parts were found inside of storage tank #103 during the repair works. The debris is consistent with the land attack cruise missile, which has been previously documented by the Panel as having been used in several attacks on targets in KSA in 2019 (annex 16 of [S/2020/326](#)) and whose parts were seized by the U.S. Navy from a dhow in the Gulf of Aden in November 2019 (paragraph 79 and annex 19 of [S/2021/79](#)). The damage to storage tank #103 is also consistent with a missile of this type. The distance between the facility and Houthi-controlled territory is about 700 kilometres, which would put it close to maximum range estimated by the Panel for this weapon system. Whereas the Houthi forces have claimed that the missile used in the attack was a “Quds-2” cruise missile, during its inspection the Panel has not been able to identify significant design differences to the “Quds-1” model which was used in 2019. The Panel is investigating the chain of custody of some of the commercial components used in the manufacturing of the missile (annex 23) to establish whether the missile was manufactured in Yemen, as claimed by the Houthis, or supplied by an external party.

22. The Aramco Bulk Plant can be considered as a dual-use object under IHL as it provides supplies both to the Saudi military and civilians. However, according to information received by the Panel, most petroleum products distributed by the facility are for civilian use. For instance, the Panel was informed by a company representative that approximately one percent of the aviation fuel distributed by the Bulk Plant are supplied to the Royal Saudi Air Force in Jeddah. As for other petroleum products distributed to the military, the Panel was unable to obtain specific data. Storage tank #103, which was the specific objective of the attack (see paragraph 3 above) was not providing an effective contribution to the Kingdom's military action in Yemen and the Panel fails to see how its

destruction offered the Houthis forces a definite military advantage. Therefore, the Panel considers that the tank was, at the time of the attack, a civilian object²¹⁴. In addition, the Panel notes the importance of the Aramco Bulk Plant facility in providing supplies to critical civilian infrastructures such as the King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah, the Saudi Electricity Company and the Saline Water Conversion Corporation. The Panel concludes that the principle of distinction was not respected in this attack.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ See CIHL rules 8 and 9.

²¹⁵ See CIHL rule 1.