

A Less than Modest Proposal to End the War in Yemen. “I am Writing This on Thanksgiving Eve”

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“I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled ...” —Jonathan Swift, 1729 (from “A Modest Proposal”)

I am writing this on Thanksgiving eve. Tomorrow, like so many other fellow Americans, I will be passing the mashed potatoes and gravy, calling for more cranberry sauce, and once again feeling pangs of conscience as the turkey platter comes my way and I imagine industrial-scale factories where millions of farm-raised turkeys are slaughtered and otherwise prepared for consumption. In Plymouth, hundreds will gather for a Day of Mourning in recognition of the suffering Native Americans have endured since Europeans first began their conquest of indigenous lands over 500 years ago.

It will be a day of mourning for me as well. For that matter, every day lately has become a day of mourning as I reflect upon my country’s role in the starvation and slaughter of the people of Yemen. Through its open-ended support of Saudi Arabia’s illegal war against Yemen’s Houthi rebels, the U.S. is complicit in what has become the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. The statistics are appalling: At least 10,000 Yemenis have been killed, the majority of whom are innocent civilians; millions have been displaced; and, according to [UN reports](#),

“some 7 million people in Yemen are now on the verge of starvation. Yemen is also in the throes of a cholera epidemic that has infected more than 900,000 people.”

Cholera is an infectious disease that occurs when a person ingests food or water contaminated with a particular type of bacterium. Typically, feces from an infected person are the source of contamination. In Yemen, Saudi planes have deliberately targeted the country’s water- and sewage-treatment plants, and its electrical infrastructure. Result: People are consuming untreated food and water and becoming ill. Cholera causes severe diarrhea, which in turn can lead to dehydration. If not remedied in time, dehydration will lead to shock and death in just a few hours.

[The International Committee of the Red Cross](#) predicts that a million people will become victims of the cholera epidemic by the end of this year. Disease and starvation are weapons of choice Saudi Arabia and its partners in crime are deploying against their enemies in Yemen, whom they regard as proxies of their major regional foe—Iran. To prevent the

spread of Shia Islam in its own backyard, the Sunni regime of Saudi Arabia is waging total war on the people of Yemen, now suffering from severe, life-threatening shortages of food and medicine.

These shortages are not the results of an earthquake or other natural disaster. They are the intended consequences of the bombing and shelling of Yemen's civilian infrastructure by Saudi Arabia, and its imposition of a nearly total air, sea, and land blockade that has made an estimated 70% of Yemen's population dependent on imported food and other forms of humanitarian aid, which the blockade has severely restricted—with the consent and active participation of the most indispensable nation on the face of the planet—the United States. We can thank Saint Obama for getting the ball rolling when his Administration authorized the shipment of more than \$100 billion worth of weapons to the Saudi military, a largess that Trump has continued in the form of an additional \$110 billion in weapons sales to the most despotic regime in the Middle East and the heart and soul of Wahhabism, a perversion of Islam that has brought nothing but suffering to the people of the region.

Our role in the crisis is not limited to the provision of high-tech weapons and munitions; the military has been waist-deep in the Big Muddy of turning Yemen, the poorest country in the Arab world, into a nation of widows and orphans. As former Green Party vice presidential candidate [Ajamu Baraka](#) rightly points out:

This is a war that could not then or today have been launched and executed without direct support from the U.S. military. The United States provided critical support in the form of intelligence sharing and targeting, air-to-air refueling, logistics support, participation in the naval blockade, and billions of dollars in weapons sales.

So let us bow our heads and give thanks for America's continuation of the war of conquest that began five centuries ago and has evolved into the imperium's onslaught against the poor and defenseless elsewhere in the world and its ruthless drive for hegemony, even when this means supporting the likes of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and other heartless rulers as long as our interests and theirs are closely aligned.

It's an old story. Not that long ago, the U.S. and Iraq were bedfellows until Saddam Hussein broke the rules and had to be "taken out." I wager the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia is well-acquainted with the story of Saddam's rise and fall, and the means by which the U.S. brought Iraq to its knees. In the first Persian Gulf War (1991), the U.S. military targeted Iraq's civilian infrastructure, including water- and sewage-treatment plants, and the electrical system. And for over a decade, successive U.S. Administrations maintained a comprehensive embargo, allowing in only a trickle of humanitarian supplies. What we're seeing in Yemen in year three of the war with Saudi Arabia is not that far a cry from what the Iraqi people endured under sanctions, imposed by the UN but enforced by the U.S. and UK. Severe malnutrition, the rise of communicable, water-borne diseases, and high rates of infant and maternal mortality were all directly related to the near-total destruction of Iraq's civilians infrastructure and the continuation of a sanctions regime which prevented Iraq from importing necessary spare parts, restoring its electrical system to full capacity, and keeping the water-treatment plants running. Thanks largely to the role of the U.S. in making the Iraqi people pay for their leader's intransigence, hundreds of thousands of innocent human beings, mostly the old, the young, and the poor, died.

According to [Save the Children](#), disease and starvation—the poison fruits of the war between Yemen and Saudi Arabia—could very well claim the lives of more than 50,000 Yemeni children by the end of the year. Right now, the Saudi-imposed and U.S.-condoned blockade is killing an estimated 130 Yemeni children each and every day. One thing you can say for sure about the U.S. is that no matter which party is in power, geopolitical interests and objectives will almost always trump the need for compassion and humanity. I am thankful that Connecticut Senator Chris Murphy had the courage to stand up on the floor of the Senate on Tuesday, November 14 to denounce U.S. support for the war in Yemen and to hold up photos of starving Yemeni children as graphic evidence of the suffering our support has enabled. And I am also thankful that the day before Senator Murphy's address, "the [House of Representatives](#) voted 366-30 in favor of a non-binding [resolution](#) that said the U.S. role in the war had not been authorized by Congress."

It will take much more than a non-binding resolution and a Senator's act of conscience to stop the bloodshed in Yemen and bring an end to the war. I mourn for the victims of this war and when I sit down with friends on Thanksgiving day, I will think of the children in Yemen and in other parts of the world where there is not enough food or no food at all not because of drought or other natural causes, but because of the inhumanity that passes for leadership and the policies that come from men and women whose own hearts must have broken long ago, and who cannot feel the pain of their brothers and sisters, and take no responsibility for putting an end, once and for all, to this suffering.

I will be thankful that my wife and I have created a lasting marriage in which we honor and support each other's choices, and I will be thankful for the friends with whom I will share the Thanksgiving meal, and for the many fine and courageous individuals in every part of the world who are doing everything in their power to build a truly revolutionary new world order founded upon the principles of justice and equality; men and women struggling to preserve and enhance the beauty of our all-too fragile planet and safeguard its riches for generations to come, and to oppose all those who would trample this beauty to death in the name of maximizing profits and controlling the lion's share of Earth's natural resources.

If Jonathan Swift were alive today, I can well imagine him considering the tragedy that is unfolding in Yemen. I don't doubt for a moment that he would mourn the dying of so many innocents. Perhaps his satirical gifts would inspire him to pen another "modest proposal," this time in response to the sight of so many starving, emaciated children. He would understand that their suffering and the suffering of their families are not accidental but rather the consequences of political stratagems in which the safety, health, and well-being of ordinary people have little or no value. He might also determine that the root cause of the conflict is Saudi Arabia's fear and hatred of Shia Islam and its most powerful advocate—Iran. The solution to this conflict, therefore, would be to completely block the transmission of this religious doctrine and practice to the Kingdom and its neighboring countries, or so Swift might conclude.

To that end, I can well imagine him proposing the creation of the world's largest mosque—a structure that would encompass the entire Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Construction would begin with the building of a wall around the country. While the wall is being built, a selection of the finest artists in the Arab world would design the *qubba*, or dome, large enough to sit comfortably on top of all sides of the wall. Skylights cut into the dome would allow ample sunlight into the Kingdom, and a massive air conditioning system would keep Saudi Arabia's temperature at a moderate 75° Fahrenheit, or 24° Celsius.

Using its vast wealth, the Royal Family could afford to provide each of its citizens with a lifetime of financial support under one condition—that they would never question the authority of their rulers or conspire to foment revolution. With the Saudi version of Sunni Islam under lock and key, so to speak, the Kingdom would have no reason for waging war against its neighbors. The very idea would eventually be seen as ludicrous, irrational, unnecessary. To control the population of Shia Muslims and other minority groups living within the Kingdom, the offspring of these groups could be easily converted into kebab for the Royal Family, and its vast network of sycophants and tribal members.

Best of all, to keep the people happy and carefree, in addition to providing an indestructible, lifelong safety net, the Kingdom could install the latest laser technology to turn the country's vast deserts into an awe-inspiring mirage of ocean vistas. The oceans, of course, would be hologram projections, as true to life as possible, complete with frolicking dolphins, breaching whales, boats under sail, and so forth.

With the entire country transformed into one vast prayer hall, all of human life, from its most humdrum tasks to its highest pursuits, would be an exercise in devotion. If they were so inclined, the Royal Family might also purchase naming rights from the Disney corporation and call their land the Magic Kingdom by the Sea (the Red Sea, actually). Tourists from all over the globe would flock to Saudi Arabia, thus generating an income stream equal to what it derives from its oil wealth. It's quite likely that the country would be designated as one of the new Wonders of the World.

Granted, what Jonathan Swift might propose, were he alive today, does sound "over the top." Personally, I would propose at the very least a moratorium on all weapons sales to Saudi Arabia and its allies, an unconditional end to the blockade, a major relief effort bringing in tons of life-saving supplies, and an independent investigation into war crimes committed by the Saudi-led coalition, its supporters—the U.S. and UK—and Houthi forces. And I would ask my fellow Americans to consider the plight of the people of Yemen, particularly the children, and do whatever is in their power to bring this tragedy to an end, starting perhaps with the use of social media or direct conversations with friends, co-workers, family members—informing them about the nature of this war and reminding them (gently, of course) that, as citizens of Saudi Arabia's most powerful enabler, we have a responsibility to speak out against the violence, stand in solidarity with the victims of this violence, and advocate for Congressional action on behalf of the Yemeni people.

George Capaccio is a writer and activist living in Arlington, MA. During the years of U.S.- and UK-enforced sanctions against Iraq, he traveled there numerous times, bringing in banned items, befriending families in Baghdad, and deepening his understanding of how the sanctions were impacting civilians. His email is Capaccio.G@gmail.com. He welcomes comments and invites readers to visit his website: www.georgecapaccio.com

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