

Biden Urged to Force End to US-Backed Saudi Blockade After Chilling Report on Starving Yemeni Children

"President Biden should demand: 'MBS, lift the blockade'... This is a moment for moral clarity and bold leadership."

By [Jake Johnson](#)

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Progressive members of Congress are demanding that President Joe Biden bring pressure to bear on Saudi Arabia to end its yearslong blockade on Yemen—which has been maintained with U.S. help—after new reporting provided a closer look at the horrific suffering caused by the kingdom’s ongoing obstruction of food, medicine, and other essential supplies.

“With 400,000 children now at risk of starvation in Yemen, the U.S. must tell the Saudis in no uncertain terms: immediately end the blockade and let humanitarian aid in,” Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) [said](#) Thursday.

A *CNN* [investigation](#) into the U.S.-backed Saudi blockade on Yemen, which began in 2015, found that it has been more than two months since the blockade “has allowed tankers packed with the necessary fuel for food and supplies to reach starving Yemenis [and] to dock at the crucial port Hodeidah, which is controlled by the Houthis.”

“Fourteen tankers scheduled to dock there are currently being held off the Saudi coast, according to a vessel tracking app,” *CNN* reported Wednesday. “All of which goes against a United Nations agreement.”

Nima Elbagir, an international correspondent to *CNN*, traveled to northern Yemen to observe—and to show the public—the appalling conditions that the head of the U.N. World Food Programme (WFP) [described](#) earlier this week as “hell.”

“We have a vaccine for this. It is called food,” said WFP executive director David Beasley, who [warned](#) that Yemen is on the brink of the worst famine in modern world history.

“Our window to save lives in Yemen is closing fast,” Beasley [tweeted](#) Friday. “We cannot turn our backs on the innocent victims of this war.”

Watch Elbagir's dispatch (*Warning: The footage is disturbing*):

CNN's reporting prompted fresh pressure on the Biden administration—which has vowed to bring an end to the Saudi-led coalition's war on Yemen—to use the U.S. government's leverage as a major Saudi partner to force the brutal kingdom to lift the blockade, which the United Arab Emirates is also helping to enforce.

"President Biden should demand: 'MBS, lift the blockade,'" [tweeted](#) Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.), referring to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. "They will fold. They are desperate for American military aid, troop presence, and investment opportunities. This is a moment for moral clarity and bold leadership."

Matt Duss, a foreign policy adviser to Sanders, noted that the "U.S. hasn't just 'partially funded' this war. We've provided the planes, bombs, targeting intel, and midair refueling."

"We are fully implicated in Yemen's destruction," said Duss. "We need to be an equal part of its reconstruction."

Excellent, courageous journalism here.

Would only add that the US hasn't just "partially funded" this war. We've provided the planes, bombs, targeting intel, and midair refueling. We are fully implicated in Yemen's destruction. We need to be an equal part of its reconstruction. <https://t.co/yw4wkTJM0c>

— Matt Duss (@mattduss) [March 11, 2021](#)

Biden won [widespread applause](#) from peace organizations and progressive lawmakers for moving last month to end U.S. support for the Saudi-led coalition's "offensive operations" in Yemen, but observers questioned whether the administration's move would have any impact on the devastating air, land, and sea blockade, which has persisted through the coronavirus pandemic.

"As long as the blockade is in place, millions of Yemenis will be at risk," Bruce Riedel, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, [told](#) Al-Jazeera last month. Last week, Riedel [called](#) the blockade an "offensive military operation that kills civilians."

Writing for *Responsible Statecraft* on Friday, Middle East analyst Arwa Mokdad [argued](#) that "if Biden is truly dedicated to ending U.S. offensive support to the Saudis and supporting peace in Yemen, he must press the two Gulf powers to immediately end their blockade."

"By lifting the blockade," Mokdad wrote, "we can avert the looming famine and start productive peace negotiations."

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