

Crimes against Humanity: US-backed Saudi Blockade Deprives 2.5 Million Yemenis of Clean Water

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As a US-backed Saudi tightening of the blockade against the impoverished and war-ravaged country of Yemen enters its third week, the International Committee of the Red Cross has reported that pumping stations and sanitation facilities in both the Yemeni capital of Sana'a and the south-central city of Bayda have run out of fuel, leaving 2.5 million in crowded urban areas without access to clean water.

The ICRC had reported last Friday that the Yemeni cities of Ta'izz, Sa'ada and Hudaydah had been deprived of clean water and sanitation due to the blockade. It added on Monday that water and sewage systems in the cities of Dhamar and Amram are operating at only half their normal capacity.

The aid agency warned that this breakdown threatened to reignite the worst cholera epidemic in modern history, with over 940,000 people already infected and more than 2,200 reported deaths due to the disease just since April. New cases are still being reported at the rate of some 2,600 per day and that number is now expected to rise sharply. Meanwhile, a rapidly spreading diphtheria outbreak has also placed at least 1 million Yemeni children at risk.

The blockade has shut down nearly all airports, seaports and borders since November 6, leaving a country dependent upon imports for 90 percent of its food on the brink of mass starvation.

A US-funded famine survey released on Tuesday warned that thousands of Yemenis will die daily if the Saudi-led blockade is not lifted. The Famine Early Warning Systems Network noted that, even before the tightening of the blockade, at least 15 million Yemenis were confronting a severe food crisis or worse.

“Therefore, a prolonged closure of key ports risks an unprecedented deterioration in food security to Famine across large areas of the country,” the survey said.

Last week, the relief group Save the Children warned that hunger and disease will kill at least 50,000 Yemeni children under the age of five before the year's end as a result of the desperate conditions created by the nearly three-year-old US-backed war against Yemen.

Jan Egeland, head of the Norwegian Refugee Council and the UN's former aid chief, issued a

stark and pointed warning in a tweet Tuesday:

“US, UK & other allies of Saudi [have] only weeks to avoid being complicit in a famine of Biblical proportions. Lift the blockade now.”

This follows a statement signed last week by a number of international relief agencies, including the UN, the International Rescue Committee and Save the Children, which stated:

“Ongoing obstruction by the Saudi-led coalition to the delivery of critical supplies is a measure which may amount to collective punishment of millions of Yemeni people. It exacerbates the world’s worst humanitarian crisis where almost three years of war have left over twenty million people in need of assistance, seven million of them on the brink of famine.”

What is unfolding in Yemen is unquestionably a war crime and one of the worst acts of collective punishment against a civilian population since Hitler’s Third Reich.

The US government and military have played an indispensable role in enabling the reactionary Saudi monarchy to carry out this crime. Massive arms deals have supplied the Saudi air force with missiles, cluster bombs and other munitions that have been used to reduce Yemeni schools, hospitals, residential areas, farms, factories and basic infrastructure to rubble. US Air Force planes are flying refueling missions to allow the Saudis to carry out round-the-clock bombing, while intelligence officers are supplying them with targets. The US Navy is deployed off Yemen’s coast backing up the Saudi blockade.

In Saudi airstrikes Monday, three civilians were killed in the northern province of Sada’a, while another nine were killed and three more wounded when a Saudi warplane bombed a vehicle in Hudaydah province. The day before, a Saudi airstrike killed eight children and three women in a residential area in Yemen’s northern Jawf province.

The Trump administration has signaled the Saudi regime that it enjoys unconditional support from Washington in carrying out this near-genocidal aggression. The US is seeking to build up a military alliance with Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms, together with Israel, in a bid to reverse the growth of Iran as a regional obstacle to the imposition of American hegemony in the oil-rich Middle East.

The administration has remained silent on the catastrophic deepening of the worst humanitarian crisis on the face of the planet, issuing a protest only over Yemen’s Houthi rebels firing a missile that was shot down on November 4 near the Saudi capital of Riyadh before doing any serious damage. This justifiable retaliation for the merciless bombing of civilian targets in Yemen was attributed by both the Saudi regime and the US—without any evidence—to Iran, and seized upon as the justification for the imposition of the crippling blockade.

While Iran has voiced sympathy for the Houthis and denounced the Saudi war, there has been no serious substantiation of any Iranian involvement in the fighting in Yemen or any significant arms shipments from Iran. Saudi Arabia has intervened in Yemen, the poorest country in the Arab world, because it fears the emergence of any regime on its border that is not a puppet of the House of Saud.

The US role in the war to starve the Yemeni people into submission has developed behind the backs of the American people, with the complicity of the Congress, both major political parties and the corporate media. Support for the war began under the Obama administration and has only escalated under Trump.

Last week, Democrats and Republicans in the House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved a cowardly and toothless resolution that called for an end to actions in Yemen “inconsistent with the laws of armed conflict” and “unobstructed access for humanitarian organizations,” while praising the Saudi regime and denouncing Iran.

While the initial bill included language threatening a cut-off of military support to the Saudi aggression, that was stripped from the legislation, as was a reference to the 1973 War Powers Act, which requires the US president to end foreign military interventions within 60 days unless they are approved by Congress. The bill that was passed merely noted impotently:

“To date, Congress has not enacted specific legislation authorizing the use of military force” in Yemen.

Meanwhile, the CBS News program “60 Minutes” broadcast a segment on Yemen Sunday titled “When Food Is Used as a Weapon,” which managed to present a stark picture of the intense human suffering in Yemen, while deliberately obscuring the fact that the US is fully complicit in inflicting these conditions upon the Yemeni people. Not a word was said in the broadcast about direct US military participation in the Saudi war or the massive arms deals that have allowed it to continue.

This deliberate misinformation from the politicians and the media is designed to keep the American public in the dark as Washington creates the conditions for a new region-wide war against Iran that could rapidly eclipse the immense carnage inflicted upon Iraq and Afghanistan, while paving the way to a third world war.

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