

The Desolation of Yemen. The Forgotten War

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Global Research, November 22, 2019

[The American Conservative](#) 21 November 2019

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Military Militarization](#) and [WMD](#)

[Ignored by much of the Western media], The Jerusalem Post [reports](#) on the worsening humanitarian crisis in Yemen:

“There is nothing that shows any improvement,” Hisham Al-Omeisy, an independent Yemeni political analyst, told The Media Line. “The only thing that is visible in the media is that there is less coverage.”

Perhaps this is due to conflict fatigue or because the protests in places like Lebanon and Iraq have become the topic du jour. Whatever the reason, the Yemen conflict, now being called the “forgotten war,” is in danger of becoming even more forgotten when it comes to the human cost.

Olivia Headon, Yemen spokeswoman for the UN’s International Organization for Migration (IOM), says that conditions for 3.6 million people displaced by the conflict have worsened in the past half year because of the weather.

“We have had really heavy rain, which has caused people who are already displaced by conflict to be displaced by floods,” Headon said. “This is still the largest humanitarian crisis in the world.”

The war on Yemen has been “forgotten” more times than I can count. It has been common to describe the war and humanitarian crisis this way, because it suggests that the problem is simply outside neglect rather than complicity in causing the disaster. Unfortunately, the U.S. government and other Western governments have not ignored or forgotten Yemen. On the contrary, they have paid it the worst kind of attention possible by providing arms and support to the Saudi coalition’s interminable military campaign. Yemen would be much better off if the Saudi coalition’s arms suppliers and patrons had forgotten all about it, but the opposite has been true.

Yemen has been the world’s worst humanitarian crisis for almost as long as the war has been going on. The numbers of people at risk from starvation and disease continue to horrify as they grow ever larger. This year’s cholera epidemic has now spread to more than 750,000 cases. The World Health Organization has [warned](#) that Yemen’s devastated health care system cannot cope with the rampant spread of disease fueled by the conditions created by the war:

The World Health Organization warns disease outbreaks are flourishing in Yemen and many people are dying from a lack of health care and serious shortages in supplies and personnel.

Yemen's economy is in tatters and its health care system in a state of near total collapse after more than five years of conflict. The WHO says about half of Yemen's health facilities are functioning but are suffering from serious shortages of medicine, equipment and staff.

Consequently, it says health teams are unable to respond quickly to disease outbreaks and epidemics, which are thriving. For example, the WHO says a cholera outbreak in January is still ongoing and so far, has infected more than three-quarters of a million people and killed nearly 1,000.

In addition to the spread of cholera, there has also been an outbreak of diphtheria that has affected many hundreds more. Malaria and dengue fever have been spreading as well. Tens of thousands of cancer patients cannot receive treatment because of the terrible conditions and the unaffordable costs:

"Another challenge, of course, are the non-communicable diseases. An estimated 35,000 cancer patients amongst which 10% are children, and more than one million people who suffer from non-communicable diseases will no longer receive life-saving treatment. Also, a total of 7,000 renal patients were in need of weekly sessions in 2019," he said.

The war has made it increasingly difficult to deliver essential supplies to isolated parts of the country, and Save the Children [warns](#) that thousands more children are being cut off from their food supplies:

An estimated 17 000[1] children living in hard to reach areas in Yemen- cut off by war -are at increased risk of severe acute malnutrition and death if issues with aid access are not urgently resolved, Save the Children reveals today.

Currently, 75 districts in Yemen are 'hard to reach' according to the UN definition - areas that humanitarian actors cannot regularly access for the purpose of sustained humanitarian service delivery[2]. More than 4.4 million people live in hard to reach areas, including almost 2,2 million children. 80 percent of these areas face crippling food shortages (IPC4)[3], which is one step away from famine. By comparison, half of the accessible districts face that level of food insecurity.

A further 121 000 [4] children under five in these hard to reach areas are already moderately malnourished, and are at risk of sliding into severe malnourishment. Children in these areas are much less likely to receive life-saving goods like medicines and therapeutic foods with only 35 [5] percent of these children having received the support they needed by September 2019.

The widespread starvation and spread of preventable disease should make Yemen's humanitarian crisis one of the world's top stories every week, but except for a couple brief surges in interest over the last few years virtually no one writes about what is happening to the people of Yemen. It almost never shows up in television reports, and it is a surprise when it comes up in our political debates. The burden is [heaviest](#) on the young and the vulnerable:

Swangin explained that some 12.3 million children there are now dependent on foreign aid.

“Almost the entire population of Yemen under 18 now requires some sort of humanitarian assistance to be able to survive,” he said. “Each day of the conflict makes the humanitarian situation worse.”

Millions of people are starving thanks to policies supported by our government, and the man-made famine that is unfolding barely registers here. Hundreds of thousands suffer from preventable and treatable diseases, but their health care facilities have been destroyed and damaged and their supplies of essential medicine and equipment have been strangled. The people of Yemen have been condemned to years of living in hell, and our government has played a significant role in sending them there. They will need substantial assistance to recover from the disaster that has befallen them over the last five years:

“Even if the conflict stops, we will still have the humanitarian crisis. Just because fighting stops doesn’t mean that everyone is going to be able to go home straight away or have access to employment like they did before,” she said. “They will still need support from the international community.”

The U.S. has been involved in helping to wreck and starve Yemen, and it is incumbent on our government to do what it can to stop causing more harm and to help repair the damage that our policy has caused.

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Featured image: Rubble aftermath of a Saudi airstrike on a Yemeni neighborhood in 2015. [Almidad Mojalli/Voice of America](#)

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