

Kerry in Riyadh: A Meeting of War Criminals

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US Secretary of State John Kerry appeared side by side with his Saudi counterpart, Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir, in Saudi Arabia's capital of Riyadh Thursday and praised the monarchical oil regime for its role in the bloody nearly two-month-old war against Yemen, the most impoverished nation in the Arab world.

The Saudi royals were to be commended, he said, for their “initiative to bring about a peaceful resolution through the announcement of their intent to establish a full, five-day, renewable ceasefire and humanitarian pause.”

Kerry used the word “intent” advisedly. Even as he spoke, Saudi warplanes continued to pound Yemeni homes, schools and hospitals into rubble, carrying out at least seven airstrikes Thursday against the port city of Hudaydah and five against the northwestern provincial capital of Sa’ada, a stronghold of Yemen’s Houthi rebel movement that the Saudi regime is determined to crush.

Earlier, Saudi warships fired rockets into the town of Hajjah, striking the Maydi Hospital, and more than 100 airstrikes in other areas of the country left scores dead, many of them women and children.

Neither Kerry nor Jubeir said when the five-day “humanitarian pause” would begin, nor did they provide any specific definition of its terms. Jubeir indicated, however, that it would be dependent on the Houthi rebels laying down their arms.

This is not the first time the Saudi regime indicated that it would call a halt to the bloodbath it has unleashed on Yemen. On April 21, after nearly a month of bombing, it proclaimed that Operation Decisive Storm, the title given to its air war against Yemen, had ended and a new phase centered on achieving a political resolution of the Yemeni conflict would begin. Instead, the air strikes only intensified.

The United Nations has put the death toll from the Saudi-led war at more than 1,400, with thousands more wounded, the overwhelming majority of the casualties civilians. Some 300,000 people have been forced to flee their homes. Bombs have demolished at least 30 schools and the violence has left nearly 2 million school children unable to attend classes.

An estimated 20 million people, or 80 percent of the population, are going hungry as a Saudi-led blockade of Yemen’s harbors together with repeated air strikes that have destroyed runways at the country’s airports have cut off its food supplies.

Speaking in Djibouti, a stop on his way to Saudi Arabia, Kerry postured as if the imperialist power he represents were just one more humanitarian enterprise. He declared that

Washington was

“deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation that is unfolding in Yemen” and urged “all sides, anybody involved, to comply with humanitarian law and to take every precaution to keep civilians out of the line of fire.”

Who does the US secretary of state think he’s kidding? Washington is not some benevolent bystander in this bloodbath.

The White House and the Pentagon have backed Saudi Arabia to the hilt since the war began, rushing it fresh arms, including deadly cluster bombs, banned by the vast majority of the world’s nations because of their murderous effect upon civilians. It has set up a US command center in Riyadh to supply the Saudi Air Force with targeting intelligence, and it has dispatched US Air Force KC-135 Stratotankers to the region to carry out daily aerial refueling of Saudi warplanes, so that the airstrikes can continue around the clock.

Last year, Saudi Arabia spent \$80 billion on arms, making it the fourth largest weapons purchaser in the world. The Obama administration is preparing to sell it and the other Persian Gulf oil monarchies even more powerful weapons systems.

The US president is scheduled to hold a summit at Camp David next week with the crowned royals of the Gulf Cooperation Council. He is prepared to offer them an advanced ballistic missile defense system as well as bunker buster bombs.

CNN quoted a senior US official as saying that “the president’s goal is building a defense infrastructure and architecture for the Gulf region that also includes maritime security, border security, and counter-terrorism.”

In other words, the Obama administration is further solidifying US reliance on the Saudi monarchy as a key pillar of its drive for domination of the strategically vital and oil-rich Middle East. Even as the US and the other major powers negotiate an agreement over Iran’s nuclear program, Washington is building up Saudi Arabia and the other reactionary Gulf states for a possible war against Iran.

The nature of the Saudi regime was made abundantly clear on the eve of Kerry’s visit with the mass beheading of five immigrants—two from Yemen and one each from Sudan, Eritrea and Chad. A Saudi national was decapitated on the day the US secretary of state landed in the desert kingdom. After these grisly public executions, the headless corpses of the victims were hung from helicopters to ensure the maximum display of the state atrocity.

The US-Saudi axis gives the lie to all the pretexts used by US imperialism to justify the decades of wars that have taken the lives of over a million in the Middle East, from the claim that it intervened to fight for “democracy” to the lie that it was waging a “war on terrorism.”

Even as it continued bombing Yemeni cities, the Saudi air force, with Washington’s blessings, dropped arms and supplies this week to Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) forces in Yemen, a movement that the Obama administration had previously portrayed as the paramount terrorist threat. As the most rabidly sectarian enemies of the Houthis—inspired by the Saudi monarchy’s state religion of Wahhabi Islamism that animates similar movements, from ISIS to Boko Haram—AQAP has now been recast as Yemeni patriots.

As in Iraq, Libya and Syria before it, Washington's role in the Yemeni war is based not on humanitarian concern, support for democracy or hostility to terrorism. It is pursuing the predatory interests of US imperialism, attempting to offset American capitalism's economic decline by military means. It is prepared in this process to spill unlimited amounts of blood and to drag the peoples of Middle East, the United States and the entire planet into a third world war.

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