

Saudis Try Yemen Peace Initiative - For More Than an Hour

US-sponsored war crimes resume as Yemenis fail to give up their country

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While the US publicly plays Pontius Pilate washing his hands clean, the Saudi-led coalition of Arab police states continue to enjoy US support for their one-sided war. The same Arab dictatorships that continue to wage aggressive war with impunity against a defenseless Yemen have, at the same time, [scaled back on fighting](#) the militant Islamic State despite its hold on large parts of two other Arab countries, Syria and Iraq. Seriously, why fight someone who might do you harm in return?

In a rational world, the unprovoked aerial and naval attacks on an impoverished Yemen by Saudi Arabia and its allied monarchies would seem more likely to draw objection than military support from the US and its somewhat-democratic allies. In a comprehending world, the public explanations for criminal aggression by the Saudis and the US would provoke howls of derisive laughter for their preposterous fabrications. In a principled world, a dedicated peace movement and a motivated left would be filling the streets with protest.

But we don't live in a rational, comprehending, or principled world. In our world, opposition to the criminal bombing of an internationally peaceful, defenseless, collapsing state draws scant objection from the international community except for quiet, *pro forma* critiques by China, Russia, and Iran. No nation actually threatens to defend the territorial integrity or independence of Yemen. As is traditional, the Yemenis are left to defend themselves, which they haven't been able to do in the past. Now the Yemenis' greatest offense is achieving some success in their chaotic search for a more representative government than any of their neighbors will allow.

Seldom has such a clear case of criminal war, of naked aggression, drawn such yawns from the world at large. Describing the current mad consensus of power in the American imperium, with a quiet objectivity to which no reaction is expected or forthcoming, The [New York Times](#) of April 22 reports in deadpan prose the irreconcilable contradictions of an insane policy - or if there is no policy, just crazed tactics - in the second paragraph of its lead story, under this headline:

SAUDIS ANNOUNCE HALT TO YEMEN BOMBING CAMPAIGN

... The announcement followed what American officials said was pressure applied by the Obama administration for the Saudis and other Sunni Arab nations to end the airstrikes. The bombing campaign, which has received logistical and intelligence support from the United States, has drawn intense criticism for causing civilian deaths and for appearing to be detached from a

broad military strategy.

Written before the world realized that the bombing “halt” was actually only a brief pause in the Saudi terror campaign, the Times’ “explanation” was nevertheless ridiculous. With masterful flat affect, the Times assured us that the US applied pressure to get the Saudis to stop doing what we had helped them do from the beginning and were continuing to help them do. Say what?

Has there ever been a better use of the word “detached” in a piece not openly critical of authority? Not only is the Saudi air attack detached from any broad military strategy, it is detached from any military strategy at all, and it is detached from reality. Detachment from reality is one measure of insanity.

Another measure is one’s insistence on continuing to do what one has been doing while at the same time claiming that what one has done has accomplished all its objectives. Or, as Adel Al-Jubeir, Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to the US, put it [in his official statement](#) on April 22 [with imagined honest annotations]:

“We destroyed their air force.” [Even though Yemen didn’t really have an actual air force, due to corruption and neglect, which is why we were able to bomb the planes they had while they were still on the ground. And, technically, that was the Yemen government air force under the command of President Hadi, who happens to be living in Riyadh these days, but never mind about all that....]

“We destroyed their ballistic missiles, as far as we know.” [Because, after all, we don’t really know if anyone in Yemen [actually has any ballistic missiles](#). We know or we think we know they had some in 1979 and for awhile after that, but we don’t know if they ever used any and by 2010 they had, maybe, 6 launchers and maybe 33 SCUD missiles and maybe 22 other SAMs, which are surface-to-air missiles which could shoot down Saudi F-15s, for example, [if they had them](#), and if they knew how to use them, and we know none of our planes have been shot down, so you figure it out.]

“We destroyed their command and control.” [That sounds impressive, doesn’t it, but I don’t know what it really means either, in Yemen, where there are [so many different factions](#) under so many different commands and no perceptible control, except maybe the Houthis, who’ve been fighting for their independence for more than a decade without the need for sophisticated command and control bunkers and electronics and stuff.]

“We destroyed much, if not most, of their heavy equipment.” [Also an impressive accomplishment, until you ask how much heavy equipment they have, besides the handful of tanks we haven’t destroyed. But we’ve destroyed schools and hospitals and food aid depots and other heavy equipment like that, so when you add it all up, it comes to a lot of damage.]

“And we made it very difficult for them to move, from a strategic perspective.” [Nevermind that, strategically, they don’t really need to move, since they’ve held the capital city, Sana’a, for months now and they’ve pretty well got Aden and the eastern part of the country, which is pretty much all they really want. So never mind that part. And never mind the reality that it hasn’t been easy to move around Yemen for years, but that hasn’t stopped the Houthis. What we’ve done, destroying roads and bridges where we could find them, is make it harder for people to move around Yemen when it wasn’t easy in the first place, and that includes refugees and internally displaced people,

and, really who cares, we did what we could with what they had.]

“So we’ve degraded their capabilities substantially, and thereby eliminated the threat that they pose to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and, in a process, ensured the safety of our borders, our territory and our citizens.” [That is such a good line, absolutely my best line, and Western media lap it up like limp puppies, they talk about how we’ve ensured the safety of our borders and our territory and our citizens and they never ever even stop to think: Hey, Joe, wait a minute - what was the threat to Saudi Arabia? There was NO threat to Saudi Arabia, and that goes a long way toward making it possible for us to secure our unthreatened safety. And what about their capabilities, you might ask, are they not degraded? And the answer is, of course, they’ve always been degraded and now they’re a little more degraded, which makes them even less of the no threat they posed to Saudi Arabia, and also has the benefit of making the Houthis more vulnerable to Al Qaeda and to the Islamic State, and we’re counting on them to go in and finish off the Houthis, because we certainly don’t want to send Saudi boys to do the job Yemenis boys on one side or another should be doing themselves.]

“That was the objective of Operation Decisive Storm, in addition, of course, to the protection of the legitimate government of Yemen. Those objectives have been achieved.” [Sounding [a little Monty Python here](#), that was the objective here, protect Saudi Arabia and the Yemen government, those were the two objectives here, but the Yemen government part is tricky because we had to bring it to Riyadh to protect it, those are the three objectives here, even though having the Yemeni government in the Saudi capital rather curtails its ability to run things in Yemen, at least it’s protected and, having installed it undemocratically once, we have every hope of installing it undemocratically again because, after all, nobody expects the Saudi Installation. So those are the objectives that have been achieved by our chief weapons, fear, surprise, and ruthless efficiency, except the ones that haven’t been achieved.]

Having accomplished their objectives, the Saudis resume bombing

Having been the poorest country in the Middle East, and one of the poorest in the world when the [US-supported Saudi attacks](#) began a month ago, [Yemen’s humanitarian condition](#) has deteriorated. [According to Robert Mardini](#) of the International Committee of the Red Cross, on April 22, after a three-day visit there: “Nowhere is safe in Yemen. People are really facing a lot of challenges - no electricity, no water, no fuel, no public services, no garbage collection....” The next day in Geneva Mardini emphasized [the predictable result](#) of US-supported Saudi war crimes: “The humanitarian situation is nothing short of catastrophic.”

In a meaningless word game, the Saudis say the short bombing halt marked the end of so-called Operation Decisive Storm, which has decided nothing. The Saudis call their [new intensive bombing campaign](#) Operation Renewal of Hope, as if to say that they are continuing to bomb defenseless targets in order to accomplish the same objectives they claim to have already achieved, in hope that achieving them anew will be made easier by already having claimed to have achieved them.

Or, as Saudi ambassador Jubeir said of the Houthis: “The decision to calm matters now rests with them.” At the same time, Saudi prince Al-Waleed bin Talal announced that he would give a \$200,000 Bentley luxury car to each of 100 Saudi fighter pilots, in apparent appreciation of their crimes against humanity, although he didn’t put it that way.

An estimate by the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, based on Yemeni sources, reports the air war and ground fighting together have displaced some 150,000 people. The UN also estimates that of Yemen's population of about 25 million, at least 7.5 million require humanitarian assistance, and the number continues to grow.

Asked to sponsor peace talks, the UN has delivered a limited embargo

For their part, the Houthis again called for [UN-sponsored peace talks](#) and political negotiations in which they have an equal role. This is a longstanding Houthi position that has yet to be honored by Saudi Arabia or anyone else. When the international cabal comprising the Saudis, the US, and others deposed Yemen's President Saleh in 2012 and installed President Hadi in an undemocratic process, the Houthis were excluded from the process. Quite reasonably and accurately, the Houthis maintain that there is NO legitimate government of Yemen.

Because the UN did not authorize the Saudi-led war, it is by definition illegal. There is little evidence to suggest that the UN will address the questions of US-supported Saudi-led aggression in violation of the UN Charter any time soon, if ever. The UN Security Council did impose an arms embargo on Yemen, however, by a 14-0 vote, with Russia abstaining. Comparing this international behavior to American frothing over Ukraine illustrates the flexibility of application inherent in international law and the roundly pontificated moral principles supposedly underlying them.

The delusion making all this irrational, criminal, and murderous behavior seem plausible to the perpetrators and their camp followers is the claim that the Houthis are a hand puppet of Iran. President Obama says, with a straight face in public, that "We've indicated to the Iranians that they need to be part of the solution, and not part of the problem."

The big problem with that perspective is that it is detached from reality. There is no credible evidence available to suggest that Iran is anything more than a minor, largely insignificant player in Yemen, where most of the fighting on all sides is heavily supported by American weapons that have been flooding the region for decades.

Reporters at the State Department on April 21 asked what kind of evidence the administration has to support its claims against Iran, including the recent claim that Iran has been supplying the Houthis with weapons. In an evasive non-answer answer to the question, State Department flack Marie Harf effectively revealed that there's no cat in the bag:

Well, we've - this isn't something new, unfortunately. We've long talked about the support when it comes from funding or whether it's weapons supplies that the Iranians are sending to the Houthi. This has been really an ongoing relationship for a very long time. I'm happy to see if there's more evidence to share publicly of that, but this has been something we've expressed concern about for some time.

In other words, Harf is saying: look, this is something we've been saying for a long time, we don't have evidence and we don't need evidence because usually when we make the same claim over and over and over you come to accept it as true, that's the way propaganda works, that's the way propaganda is supposed to work, why are you giving us a hard time now? You can't possibly care about a minority cohort of Yemenis like the Houthis, can you?

For objective reporting of propaganda as news, try PBS or the Times

Frontline has a reputation for being about the best thing going in news reporting on PBS, which says more about [PBS news reporting](#) than it does about Frontline, none of it good. Here's Frontline's lead for an April 22 Yemen story, perfectly recapitulating the false Saudi line:

Late on Tuesday, the Saudi Arabia-led coalition that launched a military campaign - dubbed "Operation Decisive Storm" - against Houthi rebels in Yemen nearly a month ago announced that it was ending the operation. Taking its place would be "Operation Renewal of Hope."

The story quoted a Saudi general and a Saudi ambassador and went on to create the impression that American involvement consisted only of pressure to end the bombing, not an ongoing month of American logistical and intelligence support to the undeclared war on a neutral country.

Following up on its front-page "Saudis Announce Halt to Bombing" story that became so quickly inoperative, the next day's Times had a front page headline claiming that:

SAUDI DEFIANCE REFLECTS LIMITS OF US STRATEGY

Later online editions of the story changed "defiance" to "resolve," adding nuance to the propaganda. The story began by explaining that this all just goes to show "the difficulty of finding a political solution to the crisis." Actually it doesn't show that so much as it shows the intransigence of the US and the Saudis and others in their unwillingness to accept the reality that the "political solutions" they have imposed on Yemen in the past have fallen apart because of the corruption and injustice on which they were built. And it shows how unwilling the US and Saudia and others are to enter into - and abide by - a genuine political solution that treats fairly the interests of all relevant parties.

And then there's the Saudi ambassador again, invoking the largely imaginary threat from Iran as a reason Iran should have no part in any peace talks relating to Yemen. Echoing President Obama, or cueing him, Ambassador Jubeir is quoted making the same propaganda point, that Iran is "part of the problem, not part of the solution."

In fact, based on the evidence to date, the US and Saudi Arabia and its allies are the problem, and none of them are interested in what the Yemenis might accept as a solution.

And besides, they're all betting no one will ever hold them accountable for this package of war crimes and crimes against humanity any more than anyone has been held accountable for such crimes relating to Iraq, or torture, or drone strikes.

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