

US Calls for Ceasefire, Keeps Attacking Yemen

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In case you missed it, US efforts to prolong [the world's most serious humanitarian crisis in Yemen](#) continue to succeed spectacularly. US military support enables the Saudi coalition to continue to bomb markets, docks, mosques, hospitals, school buses, weddings and funerals, and other civilian targets with impunity. The Saudis' Yemeni enemy, the Houthi rebels, have no effective air defenses. On March 26, 2015, with the blessing and tactical support of the Obama administration, Saudi Arabia and its allies [launched an illegal, genocidal, aggressive war](#) on Houthi-controlled Yemen. Yemen was - and is - in the midst of a civil war in which the long-oppressed Houthis overthrew the "legitimate" government that the US and others had imposed on Yemen. Since March 2015, the US and the Saudi coalition have subjected Yemen to daily war crimes, not only killing civilians but destroying non-military targets of all sorts, causing a form of biological warfare with a cholera plague, [as well as massive famine](#) for more than half the country's 25 million people. The [UN's World Food Programme \(WFP\) head said](#) on September 27: "Yemen is a disaster and I don't see any light at the end of the tunnel right now." Yemen was not a significant issue in the American election, even as the Trump administration sanctioned and supported military escalation that heightened [the suffering of millions \(and that has already killed tens of thousands\)](#).

At the US State Department, on [November 7, the press briefing](#) focused on the ideological basis for punishing Iran for continuing to abide by the nuclear agreement that the US pulled out of (still joined by Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and China). The US blames Iran for Yemen, too, with little persuasive or significant evidence to support the propaganda bias. Eventually in the briefing there was a question about Yemen, and the exchange with State Department spokesman Robert Palladino went like this (edited, with emphasis added):

QUESTION: Yemen?

MR PALLADINO: Yemen? Let's go to Yemen in the back, please.

QUESTION: The fighting around Hodeidah [the Yemeni port critical to supplying food to the region's poorest country that was a food importer before being attacked] seems to be picking up with - and UNICEF and MSF and all these aid groups who are saying children are at risk at these hospitals. And I wonder what's happened to the U.S. call for a ceasefire.

MR PALLADINO: The - well, I would start by saying **we closely are following the developments** that are taking place in Hodeidah. As the Secretary said, we've been urging all parties to come to the table, and to recognize that there's no military victory that can be achieved in Yemen. And we continue to call for a cessation of hostilities and for all parties to support United Nations Special Envoy Martin Griffiths in finding a peaceful solution to the conflict.

QUESTION: So have there been any phone calls?...

MR PALLADINO: We are in daily contact with the special envoy....

QUESTION: Would you call on the Saudi coalition to halt this offensive that they seem to now be bearing down on in Hodedah?

MR PALLADINO: We've called for a cessation of hostilities.... Please, next question....

QUESTION: Have you had a miscommunication then, with the Saud-led coalition, that they're now beginning this offensive?

MR PALLADINO: - our assessment remains the same....

QUESTION: - to put a finer point on that, I mean, did the coalition - the Saudi coalition that the U.S. supports coordinate with or tell you in advance that they were going to increase fighting around Hudaydah or did they just ignore the Secretary's call?

MR PALLADINO: We've been clear with Saudi, Emirati, and Yemeni [government-in-exile] officials at every level **that the destruction of critical infrastructure or destruction of the delivery of vital (inaudible) aid and commercial goods is unacceptable**, and we are in close contact with our partners.

QUESTION: Just to follow up on that, because you're not really answering the question, I mean, the Secretary of State issued a very explicit statement with the Secretary of Defense saying it was time for this to end and it's not ending. Do you see that as a slap in the face, and what are you going to do about it?

MR PALLADINO: ... **We continue to call for a cessation of hostilities.** That is a cessation of hostilities and vigorous resumption of a political track. That is the way forward. That's how we are going to ease this humanitarian crisis. The United States' message remains we need to end this conflict and replace this conflict with compromise, and **that's all I have on this topic for today.**

Within the context of pervasive American deceit regarding Yemen, spokesman Palladino probably allows for some technical truths to appear. Yes, after the US called for a ceasefire, the Saudis escalated their bombing of humanitarian targets. The Saudis may or may not have consulted with the US, but the Trump administration has no stomach for criticizing this bloodshed any more than it actively objects to the gutting of Jamal Khashoggi.

According to Palladino, "the destruction of critical infrastructure or destruction of the delivery of vital (inaudible) aid and commercial goods is unacceptable," which seems to be a statement of law and decency acceptable to any humane observer. Palladino implies the lie that these crimes against humanity are unacceptable to the US, but he doesn't actually say that. Clearly, having spent years enabling the Saudis in committing war crimes, the US finds the destruction of Yemen quite acceptable. That's what Palladino really means when he says the US is "closely following the developments," in the hope that Yemeni carnage can somehow persuade the Iranians to trust us.

OK, what about [that US call for a ceasefire](#), why isn't that working?

On October 31, [US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis](#) spoke about Yemen at the US Institute of

Peace with presumably unconscious irony. Mattis said, self-contradictorily and revealingly:

We've got to move toward a peace effort here, and you can't say we're going to do it sometime in the future. We need to be doing this in the next 30 days. We've admired this problem for long enough down there.

Later the same day, [US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued a statement](#):

The time is now for the cessation of hostilities.... Substantive consultations under the UN Special Envoy must commence this November in a third country.... It is time to end this conflict, replace conflict with compromise, and allow the Yemeni people to heal through peace and reconstruction.

There was nary a tweet from the president in all this. Can one presume anything from that? In September, Pompeo [certified to Congress, over the objections of staff](#), that the Saudis and their allies were doing their darnedest to reduce civilian casualties and the US should continue to support them. This was before the Saudi escalation on Hodeidah. There is no credible evidence anywhere that the US is serious about doing anything to end the murder of Yemenis. Pompeo proposed that the ceasefire start with the Houthis ending their not very effective rocket attacks on Saudi Arabia. That's the way the US deals with aggressive war in the 21st century: support the aggressor and demand that the victim stop resisting. And the Trump administration is even [considering labeling the Houthi rebels as a terrorist organization](#), presumably following a logic that would have made the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto resistance into terrorists. Bad faith has no limits.

Both Mattis and Pompeo tried to appear as if they were taking immediate action, while in the next breath putting off any action for the near future. The [supposed ceasefire has now receded toward 2019](#) as the UN's Yemen envoy bows to the reality of US inaction and Saudi escalation.

If the US were actually serious about peace and humanitarian aid for Yemen, the US could exercise [leadership in the UN Security Council to force a peace process](#). The US could unilaterally take immediate and forceful actions to stop the war. Pompeo could rescind the bad joke of certifying the Saudis as conscientious and responsible. That might not be enough, so Mattis could disengage the US military from the genocidal bombing campaign. Without US support - including cluster bombs and other ordnance - the Saudi aggression would falter if not fail. Rather than act rationally, Pompeo and Mattis chose to posture and preen in a charade of peace-loving rhetoric.

Well, their hollow performance was on Halloween after all, and that was perhaps the point. This was high-level US dishonesty, a shabby trick-or-treat deceit. It's all trick for Yemen and endless treats for the Saudis. And for its lack of trouble, the [US gets more and more blood on its hands](#).

Late on Friday, November 9, the US and Saudis announced that - at some unstated future time - [the US will stop refueling Saudi bombers attacking Yemen](#). This is a cynical charade that will do nothing to reduce the bloodbath in Yemen, but may fool the gullible in the US that protest works.

First of all, with US help, the Saudis have developed their own mid-air refueling capability. The cessation of US refueling will have zero impact on Saudi war-making capacity.

The US will continue to support the Saudi targeting program. The US will continue to provide the Saudis with military intelligence. The US will continue to supply the Saudis with weapons and ordnance, including cluster bombs (designed to kill people and most effective against civilians). The US will continue to support the Saudi naval blockade, a primary cause of hunger and famine in Yemen (as intended). None of these or other elements of US participation in this illegal, genocidal war are addressed in Defense Secretary Mattis's expertly opaque and misleading statement:

The U.S. and the coalition are planning to collaborate on building up legitimate Yemeni forces to defend the Yemeni people, secure their country's borders, and contribute to counter al-Qaida and ISIS efforts in Yemen and the region.

The US and the coalition are the main attackers of most of the Yemeni people. The best defense for the Yemeni people is for the attackers to stop attacking, since the Yemenis remain well within their own borders. The only part of Yemen under actual Yemeni control is the northwest, where the native Houthis have governed since 2014. Southeastern Yemen is titularly under the control of the "legitimate" Yemeni government (based in Riyadh), but is effectively under a military dictatorship run by the United Arab Emirates. Eastern Yemen, which is thinly populated, is under fragmentary control of multiple forces, including ISIS and al-Qaeda, whose fortunes have been greatly enhanced by the US-Saudi obsession with preventing the Houthis from controlling their own country.

Mattis is trying to put rouge on a monster and call it beautiful. US policy in Yemen continues to be based on profound lies with no moral justification. Oh look, Mattis seems to say, we're washing our hands of refueling bombers committing war crimes. Even in its narrow truth, this does nothing to support life or peace, and US hands remain drenched in blood.

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