

US-Saudi Aggression in Yemen Celebrated by Co-Aggressor UAE

By [William Boardman](#)

Global Research, April 21, 2016

[RSN](#) 18 April 2016

The National is [an English-language publication](#) owned and operated by Abu Dhabi Media, the [government-run media organization](#) of Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). There is [no press freedom in the UAE](#). Government media report the government point of view, which rarely includes criticism of the government.

On March 26, the first anniversary of the UAE's unprovoked attack on Yemen as part of [the Saudi-led coalition](#) of mostly Arab states, the UAE's official media published a document about the carnage in Yemen illustrative of George Orwell's observation: "If you want to keep a secret, you must also hide it from yourself." The truth about the war in Yemen is a largely unreported secret. The UAE officially hides that truth from itself in [an editorial in The National](#) (which follows in its entirety, section by section). It begins with the headline:

After a year in Yemen, our resolve is firm

After a year in Yemen, the US/Saudi coalition has managed to reduce the region's poorest country to an almost unthinkable condition, where some 20 million Yemenis – about [80% of the population – need humanitarian assistance](#). In a country both under attack and on the verge of mass famine, what does "our resolve is firm" really mean if not continued crimes against humanity? The UAE editorial's first sentence has no discernible meaning at all:

The start one year ago of Operation Decisive Storm comes as a reminder of the importance of the war in Yemen.



Emiratis welcoming a UAE military convoy as it travels from the Al-Hamra military base to Zayed city after returning from Yemen, on 7 November, 2015. (photo: AFP/HO/WAM) [go to original article](#)

The anniversary of an aggression – that the Saudis proclaimed would be brief and decisive – is important mostly for its irony. An [official Saudi press release](#) of March 25, 2015, quoted the Saudi ambassador to the US saying: "The operation will be limited in nature, and designed to protect the people of Yemen and its legitimate government from a takeover by the Houthis. A violent extremist militia." By then the "legitimate" government of Yemen [had fled to the Saudi capital](#) of Riyadh. Not only has more than a year of US/Saudi-led war failed to achieve any significant military success, it has produced collateral damage on a massive scale, making the country of 25 million people perhaps the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today. This reality makes a mockery of the UAE editorial's next assertion:

The UAE joined the Saudi-led coalition campaign driven by its commitment and dedication to maintaining security and establishing peace in the region.

This is, almost literally, Orwellian in its “war is peace” mindset. From the start, the US/Saudi aggression has violated international law and committed war crimes against Yemeni civilians, using cluster bombs made in the USA (and sold to the Saudis with US taxpayer subsidies). The recently-released US State Department annual human rights report on Saudi Arabia for 2015 soft-pedals the allies’ slaughter of civilians in Yemen, and omits Saudi-dropped US cluster bombs entirely (perhaps because their lingering impact killing children over years and decades is deucedly hard to assess accurately, whereas profits can be tallied almost immediately). The full despicability of the Obama administration’s position on these inhumanities is revealed in its official unwillingness to speak on the record about the blatant hypocrisy of its morally indefensible defense of the murder of civilians for profit, [as reported in The Intercept](#):

A State Department spokesperson, who would only comment on background, pointed out that the U.S. has called on both sides of the conflict to protect civilians. He also claimed that the use of cluster munitions is not a human rights violation because the United States has not signed the ban on cluster munitions.

The State Department spokesperson did not acknowledge that only one side bombs civilians (in schools, hospitals, markets, and homes) with US-made planes dropping US-made munitions. This follows a years-long US campaign in Yemen to kill civilians with US-made drones (still in use from outside the country).

Yemen is drawn as a coherent state on maps, but most of the Yemeni-Saudi border has never been officially defined. Yemen has an ancient culture in the western part of the country, but it has never been a coherent state. The Saudis and Yemenis have engaged in sporadic, armed conflict for decades. In particular, the Saudis and the Houthis have fought over northwest Yemen and neighboring southwest Saudi Arabia, which is home to a large Houthi population. Security in the region is not directly threatened by the Yemeni civil war. For any Arab state to talk like the UAE of establishing “peace in the region” is fundamentally hilarious.

The UAE has long been a source of [support for the Islamic State](#) (aka ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh), as have Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait – all part of the coalition waging war on Yemen. Editorially, the UAE cloaks itself in the mantle of state legitimacy:

The coalition responded to the call by Yemen’s president Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi to restore his internationally recognised government to power.

To call the Hadi government “internationally recognized” is to fudge the reality that the Hadi government has only limited recognition among Yemenis. Hadi came to power through what US Ambassador to the UN [Samantha Power](#) called, somewhat falsely, the “peaceful, inclusive, and consensus-driven political transition under the leadership of the legitimate President of Yemen, Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi.” One problem with this US formulation is that Hadi’s “legitimacy” derives from his being installed as president by an international diplomatic coup, followed by his election in a race in which he was the sole candidate.

Essentially, there is no legitimate government of Yemen and has not been for decades at least. The present war of aggression by outside powers intervening in a multifaceted civil war relies for its justification on a variety of dishonest fictions. The Houthis are a sub-group of the Shi'ite Zaidis, who number about eight million in Yemen. The Zaidis [governed northwest Yemen for 1,000](#) years, until 1962. The UAE editorial invents a different historical identity:

Houthi rebels had captured the capital of Sanaa, with the support of Iran and loyalists to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, and were advancing towards the southern city of Aden. On the way, they had killed civilians and destroyed neighbourhoods, leading to a vast humanitarian crisis.

Iran is widely scapegoated as a nefarious influence in Yemen, but there is little or no evidence of Iranian involvement on a scale that could possibly make a difference on the ground in Yemen. Iran's support of the Houthis, their fellow Shi'ites, has been largely diplomatic, political, and presumably financial. Former president Saleh, who has a wide following of non-Houthis, was deposed in the coup that installed Hadi. When Saleh was president of Yemen, he also fought a Houthi insurrection. While there is little doubt that all sides in the Yemen civil war (including al Qaeda and ISIS) have committed war crimes of various degree, only the US/Saudi coalition has [bombed defenseless civilian populations](#). There is a special deceit in the UAE suggestion that the Houthis in 2015 are the cause of [the Yemen humanitarian crisis in 2016](#). A year of largely indiscriminate bombing by the US/Saudi forces is the more proximate and powerful cause, as is the year-long US/Saudi naval blockade that keeps [Yemenis caught in the bomb range](#) while at the same time denying them food, medicine, and other essentials for survival. Nevertheless, according to the UAE editorial, the Houthis - who have suffered attacks by ISIL - are somehow responsible for ISIL attacking coalition forces in the south:

The Houthis' disregard for Yemen's security created fertile ground for extremism to thrive, leading to [the latest attacks by ISIL](#) that killed 20 people in Aden on Friday.

Whatever "security" Yemen has had in recent years has been largely illusory. The US drone program in Yemen spent years creating insecurity and killing civilians until the US withdrew just ahead of the fall of the Hadi government (president Saleh had also sanctioned the lethal US military presence in Yemen). And why was the US there? Because Yemen was already "fertile ground for extremism," in particular AQAP, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which now controls roughly half of Yemen's southern coast, about 370 miles including the port city of Mukalla, with a 500,000 population. The effective allies in the US/Saudi war on the Houthis include not only the UAE and other coalition members, but also al Qaeda and ISIS - not in the sense that these "allies" share the same goals, but in the sense that the US/Saudi [genocidal obsession with the Houthis](#) has allowed and helped both ISIS and especially al Qaeda to expand and solidify positions in Yemen.

All the same, the UAE tries to blame the ISIL (ISIS) [suicide bomb attacks in Aden](#) on March 14, 2016, on the Houthis, when Aden is more or less under the military control of the Hadi government. [Saudi and UAE forces](#) have been deployed to Aden at least since July 2015, in limited numbers, to protect the Hadi government. The UAE has also secretly deployed [hundreds of Colombian mercenary soldiers](#) to Yemen, along with other

mercenaries from Panama, El Salvador, and Chile, frequently [commanded by Australians](#). During this same time period, neither Saudi Arabia nor the UAE deployed any [troops to fight ISIS in Syria](#). UAE troop strength in Yemen reportedly peaked in the fall of 2015 at [about 5,000 troops of one nationality or another](#). Currently the UAE is estimated to have about 2,500 troops in Yemen as well as other deployments in Libya and Afghanistan. The UAE, with a population of about 6 million, has a military of some [65,000 active frontline personnel](#).

The UAE's editorial summary of its year of war-making in Yemen relies on an imaginary threat of a wider war that would somehow have magically emerged from the possibility that the Houthis might secure their own country, or just part of it:

The precarious situation last year required swift intervention to guard against a wider conflict in the region. Saudi Arabia and its Gulf Cooperation Council allies, including the UAE, realised that the security of Yemen was critical for the Arabian Peninsula at large and that a military operation would be required. Iran, which has a history of meddling in regional affairs, has been backing the Shiite Houthi group to fulfil its own nefarious agenda of expanding its footprint in the Middle East. Quite simply, unless we had taken firm action, our security would have been at risk. This has come at a great cost, including the lives of more than 80 UAE martyrs.

More than a year after collaborating in an aggressive war against Yemen, the UAE can cite no credible or rational or legal basis for joining the attack – unless “a nefarious agenda” turns out to be an obscure casus belli under international law. Worse, the UAE doesn't even acknowledge, much less try to justify, the criminal brutality of its war.

This criminal brutality has been documented over and over by non-governmental organizations. Most recently, on April 7, Human Rights Watch issued a report centered on the war crime of bombing a civilian market, killing 97 civilians, 25 of them children. This is no isolated incident. The responsibility and guilt for these atrocities extends to those who sell the weapons as well as those who use them. As Human Rights Watch reported in part:

Since March 26, 2015, the UN and nongovernmental organizations have documented numerous airstrikes by coalition forces that violate the laws of war. The UN Panel of Experts on Yemen, established under UN Security Council Resolution 2140 (2013), in a report made public on January 26, “documented 119 coalition sorties relating to violations” of the laws of war.

Human Rights Watch has documented 36 unlawful airstrikes – some of which may amount to war crimes – which have killed at least 550 civilians. Human Rights Watch has also documented 15 attacks in which internationally banned cluster munitions were used in or near cities and villages, wounding or killing civilians.... The coalition has [used](#) at least six types of cluster munitions, three delivered by air-dropped bombs and three by ground-launched rockets....

None of these war crimes could possibly be committed by the Houthis and their allies, since they have no air force. Whatever the atrocities committed by Houthis, Saleh's forces, or others, the humanitarian suffering in Yemen is overwhelmingly the responsibility of the US/Saudi coalition, however the UAE editorial may spin it:

The UAE has also contributed greatly to humanitarian efforts in Yemen, especially as Operation Restoring Hope got under way. More than Dh1.6 billion has been spent on infrastructure and aid programmes to provide our brothers and sisters there with electricity, food, health services, water, sanitation, fuel and transport. We will continue to help the civilian population. Of course, the ultimate goal is a political solution that restores the legitimate government.

In late April a year ago, the Saudis announced [that Operation Decisive Storm was over](#) and had achieved its goals. Saudis also announced the beginning of [Operation Restoring Hope, which included airstrikes](#) and other military actions, as well as some relief missions.

The claim that the UAE has spent more than 1.6 billion Dirham (\$436 million) in and on Yemen is misleading. In 2015, the UAE apparently contributed that amount to United Nations humanitarian programs in Yemen, an amount exceeded only by Saudi Arabia. A contribution in the hundreds of millions of dollars appears generous, but represents only a couple of days of the cost of the war. Saudi Arabia is reportedly picking up most of the [cost of the war: \\$200 million per day](#) (\$6 billion per month).

Joining a military campaign is never an easy decision to make, but in this case it was a necessary one. As the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Dr Anwar Gargash, said on Friday, the UAE is more powerful today with the sacrifice of its martyrs, and history will remember the important role Operation Decisive Storm has played in drawing “a line between acceptance and submission, and determination and will.”

So ends the official UAE version of its Yemen adventure, a version that imagines with complete falsity that the Houthi rebellion somehow put the UAE under threat of having to accept and submit. Accept and submit to what? The Houthi rebellion was a thousand miles from the UAE and has yet to go beyond Yemeni borders (except for the sporadic fighting along the Saudi border in the northwest). In reality, the US/Saudi coalition has long demanded that the Houthis accept and submit to domination by their Sunni enemies of a thousand years. Now, in mid-April 2015, an open-ended ceasefire of sorts is settling over Yemen, with the Houthis still in control of much of the country, and the [Saudis continuing to bomb](#) at will. Ironically, if anyone has so far shown true determination and will, it is the Houthis, in their resistance to a ruthless and relentless international coalition.

As for “joining a military campaign,” which the UAE officially says is “never an easy decision to make,” the UAE has apparently managed the difficult choice once again. Now the UAE has reportedly asked the US for significant increases in military support in order [to escalate the war in Yemen](#) against AQAP, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Officials in the US and the UAE refuse to comment on the report, which would be an expansion of fighting long under way. [According to Iranian Press TV](#), tensions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE emerged after the UAE withdrew large numbers of troops following defeats in late 2015, leading to a recent plan by the Saudis to replace UAE troops with Jordanians.

On April 15, [despite the five-day old truce](#), US drone strikes and US-made apache helicopters [attacked the city of al-Houta](#), near Aden in south Yemen. Coalition officials said al Qaeda forces had withdrawn and the government controlled the city, with five soldiers reportedly killed in an operation that took four hours.

The ceasefire that started April 10 has continued to remain in effect around most of the

country, despite some violations. In the Yemeni capital of Sanaa, more than 100 miles north of al-Houta and still under Houthi control, tens of thousands of demonstrators turned out on April 15 for peaceful protest against continued airstrikes by the US/Saudi coalition.

The [UN special envoy](#) leading the peace talks scheduled to begin in Kuwait says peace has never been as close as it is today. Those talks include only “government” and “rebel” representatives. Most of the belligerents, including the US/Saudi coalition, al Qaeda, and ISIS, will not be taking part.

William M. Boardman has over 40 years experience in theatre, radio, TV, print journalism, and non-fiction, including 20 years in the Vermont judiciary. He has received honors from Writers Guild of America, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Vermont Life magazine, and an Emmy Award nomination from the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

The original source of this article is [RSN](#)
Copyright © [William Boardman](#), [RSN](#), 2016

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [William Boardman](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca