

US-Saudi War Crimes, Yemen's Humanitarian Crisis: Civilian Killings, Famine, Refugees. The Western Media's Remorseless Silence

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While the slaughter of Yemenis continues, the world remains silent in response to their screams. Why is that? Has the world lost its senses, especially to feel the sufferings of the tormented? In an alleged effort to defeat the Houthi rebels, a coalition of Arab states led by Saudi Arabia, supported by the United States and the United Kingdom have been bombarding Yemen, already one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world, with air-strikes since March 2015, sending it literally back to the stone-age.

The war has triggered a major humanitarian crisis. Since the air-strikes began,

“food prices [in Yemen] have gone up 60 percent, leaving 14 million people across the country classified as ‘food insecure’ (Yemen’s children die from bombs, bullets, hunger, ABC News, August 23).”

According to figures provided in the New York Times,

“the war has killed more than 6,500 people, displaced more than 2.5 million others and pushed one of the world’s poorest countries from deprivation to devastation (“America Is Complicit in the Carnage in Yemen”, August 17).”

Other reports have shown these figures to be much higher. Meanwhile, the United Nations has blamed the coalition for at least 60 percent of deaths and injuries to children last year, warning along with human rights groups, that the coalition may have been “commissioning international war crimes” (Saudi-led coalition could be committing ‘international crimes’ bombing civilians in Yemen, UN warns, The Independent, March 19).

At a press briefing at the United Nations on June 29, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International revealed that,

“Unlawful air strikes by the Saudi-led coalition have killed and maimed hundreds of children in Yemen and damaged dozens of schools, but the coalition strong-armed the Secretary-General in an attempt to escape scrutiny.” That is, to have Saudi Arabia removed from the UN’s list of shame. The Secretary General Ban Ki-moon himself after being bullied said, “There has been fierce reaction to my decision to temporarily remove the Saudi-led Coalition countries from the report’s annex. This was one of the most painful and difficult decisions I have had to make. The report describes horrors no

child should have to face.”

Yet, the media, and especially the western media, continues to keep mum. Why? Well, one explanation may be that because the coalition consists of those allied with the West, the western media does not want to report on the alleged war crimes that they may have committed. Another reason for such deafening silence, however, may be because most of the killings are actually being committed using weapons supplied by the West.

According to the Washington Post, the US has sold the Saudis a total of USD 20 billion in weapons over the last one year. Britain too has sold close to USD 4 billion worth of weapons to the Saudis. The Obama administration, despite aggressively lobbying for greater gun control in the US, “has discreetly brokered and authorised the sale of more arms to foreign governments than any other US president since World War II”, according to Owen B. McCormack. During the first five years of his tenure alone, “new agreements under the Pentagon’s Foreign Military Sales programme — the largest channel for US arms exports — totalled over USD 169 billion,” exceeding the amount authorised during the entire tenure of his predecessor by almost USD 30 billion.

And, of course, the main recipient of American made weapons has been Saudi Arabia — “almost 10 percent of US arms exports” while 9 percent went “to the United Arab Emirates, an ally of Riyadh in the Yemen war (“Such a long silence on Yemen,” The Hindu, August 22).” According to Congressional Research Service, even as early as 2010, the Obama administration authorised the sale of a whopping USD 90.4 billion worth of arms to the Saudis. And according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute,

“arms imports to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states increased 71 percent from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014, accounting for 54 percent of imports to the Middle East in the latter period. Saudi Arabia rose to become the second largest importer of major weapons worldwide in 2010-2014, increasing the volume of its arms imports four times compared to 2005-2009.”

Not surprisingly, many of these weapons are being used to devastating effect in Yemen according to the likes of Human Rights Watch, Oxfam and Amnesty International, including the British made cluster bombs, even though the weapon was banned in conflict decades ago because of their catastrophic effects on civilians (“British-made cluster bomb found in Yemeni village targeted by Saudi-led coalition”, The Independent, May 23).

And so it goes, with innocent Yemenis being torn to shreds by the most horrific of weapons out there, the Lords of War continue to make windfall profits. Fortunately for them, the media’s silence guarantees that there is no significant pressure to end the supply of weapons to maim and kill a bunch of poor people here and there. After all, how else will the demand for these weapons keep up with their massive supply? As the fictional character in the movie Lord of War, Yuri Orlov said, “where there’s a will, there’s a weapon”. And the “coalition of the willing”, whether it be to go to war in Iraq, or for the destruction of Yemen, have been more than ready to oblige to the will of western arms manufacturers. For the Yemenis, however, the horrors of having these weapons used on them are, unfortunately, very real. As should be our shame for failing to genuinely care for the lives of innocent men, women and children, despite repeatedly saying otherwise, as evident from our remorseless silence in the face of their desperate screams.

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