

Yemen Is Today's Guernica

The U.S.-backed, Saudi-led massacre of innocent Yemeni civilians

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On the market day of April 26, 1937, at the bequest of General Francisco Franco, a bombing of the Basque town of Guernica took place. It was carried out by Spain's nationalistic government allies, the Nazi German Luftwaffe's Condor Legion and the Fascist Italian Aviazione Legionaria. The attack, under the code name Operation Rügen, in which hundreds of people died, became a rallying cry against the brutal killing of innocent civilians.

80 years later, however, an even more criminal action is carried out against Yemeni civilians by Saudi Arabia, with the complicity of the United States. 2018 has begun with the usual deadly Saudi strikes. Recent ones in the city of Hodeida have killed 23 people and Yemenis live in fear of new strikes that do not show respect for civilians, including children.

The Yemeni civil war began in 2015 between two factions that claim to represent the Yemeni government. Houthi soldiers clashed with forces loyal to the government of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. A coalition led by Saudi Arabia launched military operations against the Houthis, and the U.S. provided logistical and military support for the campaign.

The Houthi rebels make up almost a third of Yemen, and have ruled the country for hundreds of years. Since the beginning of the hostilities, the Houthis advance to the south of Yemen has met with the constant bombardment by Saudi Arabia and its allies, resulting in a dramatic humanitarian crisis. Thousands of people have been killed, many of them civilians, and thousands more have been forced to leave their homes and are desperately trying to find food and potable water.

Contaminated water as a result of an almost total sanitation breakdown has provoked a cholera outbreak considered the worst in history. The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported more than 815,000 suspected cases and 2,156 deaths. At the current rate of infection, experts estimate that the number of cases will reach seven figures by the end of the year. Presently, almost 20 million Yemenis -more than two-thirds of the population- do not have access to clean water and sanitation.

Since the beginning of the conflict, the emergency health-care needs of the population have been so great that health care workers are unable to provide even basic medical care. When fighting intensified in some areas, there were no formal rescue services so residents and relatives had to dig out their loved ones from the rubble of damaged buildings.

An Amnesty International report, "Yemen: The Forgotten War" describes the consequences of the attacks carried out by Saudi Arabia's coalition: more than 4,600 civilians killed and over 8,000 injured; three million people forced out of their homes, 18.8 million people in

need of humanitarian assistance including food, water, shelter, fuel and sanitation and two million children out of school.

The flow of arms however, continues, unabated

. “The irresponsible and unlawful flow of arms to the warring parties in Yemen has directly contributed to civilian suffering on a massive scale,” declared James Lynch, from Amnesty International.

As Iran continues its support of the Houthis’ ragtag army, reports indicate that Saudi Arabia will purchase \$7 billion worth of arms from the U.S.

Human Rights Watch has documented that the Saudi-led coalition was using internationally banned cluster munitions in at least 16 attacks that targeted populated areas, killing scores of civilians including women and children.

Last February, the European Parliament passed a resolution calling on Federica Mogherini, the European Union’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “to launch an initiative aimed at imposing an EU arms embargo against Saudi Arabia” because of its conduct against civilians in Yemen.

In the meantime, health facilities continue to be hit by bombs and health and humanitarian workers are increasingly targeted. In a scene out of Guernica, Amal Sabri, a resident of Mokha, a port city on the Red Sea coast of Yemen, described a Saudi Arabia airstrike which killed at least 63 civilians,

“It was like something out of Judgment Day. Corpses and heads scattered, engulfed by fire and ashes.”

In Yemen today, world powers have not yet learned the lesson from Guernica.

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