

Yemen War Rages On Through First Day of Humanitarian “Cease-fire”

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Despite declarations of a temporary cease-fire to allow humanitarian aid into the country, the Saudi-led Arab coalition continued heavy strikes against Yemen's southwestern city of Abyan and the northern capital of Sanaa Wednesday, killing at least 70.

Strikes apparently targeted weapons caches on the outskirts of Sanaa, producing spectacular explosions and sending up plumes of smoke that were visible for miles. Another barrage of Saudi-led strikes reportedly decimated a Houthi convoy traveling in the south Wednesday morning.

The strikes have continued despite Saudi promises of a truce aimed at allowing UN agencies to distribute humanitarian aid to Yemeni cities, where hundreds of thousands of Yemenis face desperate shortages of food, drinkable water, electricity and other basic necessities. At least 700,000 Yemenis are in need of food assistance, according to UN estimates.

For weeks, the Saudi blockade, reinforced by the US Navy, has prevented essential supplies from reaching port, leaving millions without reliable access to water and crippling Yemeni medical centers, which are already battling dire supply shortages.

Estimates place the total number of dead as a result of the Saudi-led assault at around 1,500, with the vast majority believed to be civilians. Hundreds of thousands of Yemenis have been driven from their homes and become refugees since the war began in late March.

US drones also attacked targets inside Yemen this week, including government buildings in the port city of Al Mukalla Wednesday. The US drone strikes may have targeted several members of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), according to sources cited by Fox News.

Officials in Tehran announced Wednesday that an Iranian cargo ship has sailed for Yemen loaded with humanitarian supplies. The announcement marks a further escalation of tensions between the US, Saudi and Iranian naval forces now massing around the strategically critical choke-points on either side of the Arabian Peninsula, the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

Recent weeks have seen the strategic waterways transformed into “a tinder box,” according to a commercial risk assessment expert who spoke with Reuters.

US officials immediately denounced the Iranian move as a “political stunt” intended to provoke Washington and Riyadh. Pentagon officials insisted that the Iranian vessel reroute to Djibouti and hand over its cargo for inspection by US and UN officials.

Some 2,000 US Marines are standing by to intervene against any attempt to break the Saudi blockade of Yemen, a US Navy officer told Fox News.

Saudi warships have already begun imposing forced inspections of all ships seeking to dock at Yemeni ports. Saudi officials have insisted publicly that no Iranian vessels will be allowed to reach Yemen without being boarded and thoroughly searched.

Iranian officials responded to US warnings with rhetorical shows of defiance. Any efforts by the US or the Saudi navies to intercept the vessel could “spark a war in the region,” an Iranian military officer warned Wednesday.

Continued reports of intense fighting on the ground have underscored the fact that, official truces notwithstanding, the conflict is escalating. Major clashes continued in Yemen’s southern capital of Aden, where weeks of fighting between the Houthis and militants aligned with the deposed US- and Saudi-backed government have devastated large areas of the city.

Saudi coalition warships joined the action Wednesday, shelling targets including fuel tanks near the historic port city. Artillery barrages fell on residential neighborhoods in Taiz Wednesday as Houthi fighters battled local militants for control of the city.

From the beginning, the Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen has been backed by the United States, which is determined to retain control over the geostrategically critical country. In remarks Wednesday while meeting with officials from Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE in Paris, US Secretary of State John Kerry said that the Obama administration is prepared to reach a “clearer defense arrangement between the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] and other friendly countries and the United States.”

The US is prepared to offer the Gulf elites “a series of new commitments that will create between the US and GCC a new security understanding, a new set of security initiatives that will take us beyond anything we have had before,” Kerry said.

Kerry’s comment came in response to requests from US imperialism’s regional allies that the US formally recognize them as strategic allies on the same level as the NATO powers and Japan.

To discuss the matter, US President Barack Obama is scheduled to hold private meetings with six leading representatives of the Saudi and Gulf dynasties, including several kings, emirs and sultans, at Camp David this week. The meetings aim to assuage fears on the part of the US-allied regimes that the administration’s negotiations with Iran will undercut their own regional interests, which conflict with those of Tehran.

Saudi skittishness over a possible US-Iranian rapprochement likely explains the sudden cancellation of Saudi King Salman’s plans to attend the Camp David meetings.

Nonetheless, in comments to a recent conference at the Atlantic Council, UAE ambassador Yousef Otaiba made clear that the Gulf regimes are prepared to make compromises and “work together” with the Obama administration to secure whatever forms of strategic support Washington remains prepared to offer.

The Saudis and their Gulf partners ultimately “do not have a viable alternative strategic partnership in Moscow or Beijing,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace researcher

Karim Sadjadpour told the *New York Times* this week.

In official statements Wednesday afternoon, White House deputy national security advisor Ben Rhodes said that the US is not prepared to sign a NATO-style pact with the Arab states.

“A treaty is not what we are looking for. It took decades to build NATO and the Asian allies,” Rhodes said. The US can still “provide clear assurances that we will come to their defense,” Rhodes said.

Saudi and Gulf state demands for recognition as full strategic partners of US imperialism represent a grave warning to the Middle Eastern and international working class. National and sectarian-based conflicts, long incited and manipulated by Washington in the service of US domination of the Middle East, are threatening to ignite all-out war between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The imminent possibility of such a conflict is increasingly acknowledged in the bourgeois press. “Middle East giants Saudi Arabia and Iran are squaring up on opposing sides in the Yemen war,” Reuters noted in the opening lines of its report Wednesday.

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