

UN warns of collapse in Yemen amid Saudi-led assault

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The United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Raad Al Hussein, released a statement on Tuesday warning that the Yemen is “on the verge of total collapse.” Scores of civilians have been killed in airstrikes led by Saudi Arabia and Egypt in direct violation of international law.

“The situation in Yemen is extremely alarming, with dozens of civilians killed over the past four days,” Al Hussein stated, expressing shock at the killing of dozens of refugees by a Saudi airstrike on the Al Mazraq camp in northern Yemen. Doctors Without Borders reported that Monday’s bombing had claimed the lives of at least 40 civilians, wounding another 200.

Airstrikes by a coalition of Sunni-majority countries began last Thursday against the Iranian-supported Shiite Houthi militia and Yemeni military forces loyal to former dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh. Saudi Arabia is seeking to militarily defeat the Houthis and their allies and reinstate President Adb Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, who fled the country last week. An impending attack by Houthi militia and Saleh loyalists on Hadi’s compound in the southern port city of Aden was the catalyst for the Saudi-led assault.

The United States, which has provided intelligence and logistical support for the airstrikes, gave further support to the growing bloodbath in Yemen with the announcement on Tuesday that it would resume the delivery of weapons and military equipment to Egypt, which has pledged to send ground forces into Yemen.

US President Barack Obama approved the delivery of 12 F-16 jet fighters, 20 Harpoon anti-ship missiles, and 125 M1A1 Abrams tank kits. The shipment of new equipment and weapons had been halted in the aftermath of the military coup that brought military dictator Abdel Fattah Al Sisi to power.

The deeply impoverished Yemeni population is

bearing the brunt of the expanding US-backed air war. Airstrikes have destroyed homes, hospitals, schools and critical infrastructure in civilian areas throughout the country. Bombs have been dropped on airports and power plants in the capital city of Sanaa, the Houthi stronghold of Saada, and the western port city of Hodeida. Thousands of people have already been displaced, with many fleeing the major urban areas for rural villages where they are less likely to be killed by an airstrike.

Al Hussein reported that a division of the Yemeni army loyal to Saleh along with several allied Houthi rebel brigades attacked three hospitals in the district of Dhale, resulting in an as yet unknown number of civilian casualties. The UN has confirmed that since Friday at least 93 civilians have been killed and another 364 wounded by airstrikes and ground battles in the cities of Sanaa, Sadaa, Dhale, Hodaida and Lahij.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal stated that the bombing campaign, codenamed Operation Resolute Storm, would continue until “security, stability and unity” was achieved in Yemen.

The ongoing assault has been backed with repeated threats of an imminent ground invasion, aimed at militarily defeating the Houthis, to be led by Saudi Arabia and Egypt with contingents of soldiers from Sudan and possibly Pakistan.

While Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif pledged “all potentials of the Pakistani army” in a phone call with the Saudi king over the weekend, the Pakistani government has yet to give open support to the air war. Pakistani Defense Minister Kawaja Asif and foreign affairs adviser Sartaj Aziz met with Saudi Defense Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud in the Saudi capital of Riyadh on Tuesday to discuss their country’s role in the coalition. There are concerns

within Pakistan that any intervention will exacerbate existing tensions between Pakistani Sunni majority and its Shiite minority.

Saudi spokesman Brigadier General Ahmed Asseri told reporters on Tuesday that the initiation of plans for a ground invasion was not “automatic” and that any eventual ground war would be targeted to specific areas of the country. Despite this equivocation, Asseri concluded that “when the coalition forces confirm the need for land operation, it will not hesitate to carry this out.”

Even as it remained unclear when a Saudi-led ground war would begin Yemeni foreign minister Riyadh Yaseen, who remains loyal to Hadi, told reporters on Tuesday that he had requested a Saudi-led invasion “as soon as possible.”

Saudi Arabia has mobilized approximately 150,000 soldiers and has positioned heavy artillery and other military equipment on its border with Yemen. Multiple exchanges of rocket and artillery fire between Houthi and Saudi forces were reported along the border on Tuesday. Explosions were heard in the Shida and Al Hisama district of Saada province and in the town of Haradh in Hajja province. Residents in the area also reported Tuesday that Saudi helicopters have made multiple incursions into Yemeni airspace all along the border.

As another component of the assault, Saudi Arabia and its partners, including Egypt, have initiated a naval blockade on Yemen’s ports under the pretext of blocking weapons and supplies from reaching the Houthi fighters. The blockade has the potential to intensify hunger in a country that currently imports 90 percent of its basic wheat and rice stock. It is estimated that if food imports were to be blocked, Yemen would exhaust its reserves in approximately six months.



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