

Preparing ground invasion of Yemen, Saudi military to raze some 100 border towns

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Saudi Arabian military forces participating in the US-backed war against Yemen will raze to the ground nearly 100 villages along the Yemen-Saudi border, according to reports in Saudi media Monday.

The mass demolitions are part of the preparations by Saudi Arabia to expand its ongoing air campaign into a full-scale ground invasion of its impoverished neighbor to the south. Saturday marked the 11th day of a Saudi-led bombing campaign pounding the country, with concentrated strikes against targets around Aden and the northern city of Saada.

Strikes launched by the Saudis and allied forces from the Persian Gulf monarchies, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait, as well as from Jordan, Egypt and Sudan, continued to pound the capital of Sanaa over the weekend.

Saudi special forces are already on the ground inside Yemen, according to some reports. Saudi Arabia demanded this weekend that Pakistan join the “Arab coalition” and supply military aid in advance of a ground invasion.

At least 500 are dead and 1,700 wounded as a result of the fighting that has raged across the Saudi-Yemeni border and throughout the interior of the country. The streets of Aden are “strewn with dead bodies,” and freshly wounded residents are flooding local medical centers, according to the Red Cross. Nearly 200 civilians have been killed and more than 1,200 wounded in Aden in the past 10 days, according to a local health official cited by the BBC.

The Red Cross has called for a 24-hour “humanitarian pause” in the fighting and the Saudi blockade of Yemen, which the agency said was necessary to prevent further mass deaths of civilians.

The breakdown of Yemen’s sanitation infrastructure under the impact of the Saudi air war threatens a

devastating public health crisis, experts warn. Medical programs, including immunization programs for children, have been disrupted by severe supply shortages. Much of Aden has been without water and electricity for days, according to Reuters.

“Many, many” children have been killed since the Saudi-led assault began, according to UNICEF’s Yemen representative. Reports are emerging of mass recruitment of children into rival militias.

There is a widespread understanding that Yemen is being rapidly transformed into a slaughterhouse. Numerous governments scrambled to evacuate their citizens from Yemen over the weekend, in anticipation of further escalation of the violence, with Pakistan evacuating some 170 nationals by air on this weekend, Algeria evacuating 160, Jordan 150, Egypt 380, India 440, and Turkey rescuing some 230 of its nationals.

As Yemen’s cities and towns face bombardment from the air, the country is being torn apart by clashes between warring tribal-based militias that have stepped into the void produced by the collapse of the US puppet government of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. Installed by the US and Saudi-dominated Gulf Cooperation Council in early 2012, Hadi is currently in exile in Saudi Arabia after being deposed at gunpoint by Houthi forces in the opening weeks of 2015.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and other sectarian militant forces, meanwhile, have expanded their control over substantial areas, seizing entire towns and springing hundreds of imprisoned fighters from government jails.

The Houthi rebels now control territory in the northwest and the south and along the strategically critical western coastline, and are engaged in a chaotic civil war with AQAP fighters and other militant groups that effectively control areas along the southern coast.

AQAP captured the city of al Mukalla on Friday, forcing government forces to flee their fortifications and abandon their US-made weapons. It is becoming clear that the group is seen by Saudi Arabia as a critical fighting force against the Houthis.

Previously, AQAP's activities were invoked as the pretext for US intervention and military presence in Yemen, with AQAP constituting one of the main targets of Washington's drone warfare. Now, the group may soon be fighting on behalf of the Saudi coalition, and thus effectively on behalf of Washington.

The Saudi monarchy seeks to maintain power over the impoverished Saudi and Middle Eastern working classes through a counterrevolutionary and sectarian strategy that includes the violent suppression of Shia minorities both inside and along its borders, making the extreme-right Sunni militants of AQAP all the more attractive as potential allies against the Iran-linked Houthis.

Nonetheless, the efforts of Western media to try to portray the conflict as driven primarily by a sectarian struggle of Sunni versus Shia are calculated to cover over the fundamental responsibility of the US government and ruling elite for the rising tide of war in Yemen and throughout the broader region.

Far from the product of medieval religious disputes, as the self-proclaimed pundits of the US media establishment contend, the accelerating destruction of Yemen has been waged in close coordination with the US and with direct US logistical support and weaponry and flows directly from the efforts of US imperialism to maintain political domination over the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf through endless wars and militarist conspiracies.

In an analysis posted in late March, "America, Saudi Arabia, and the Strategic Importance of Yemen," Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) drew out the geopolitical considerations behind the war against Yemen.

Because the new Yemen war involves essential US global interests, the Pentagon must prepare to provide direct "combat support" for the Saudi-led war, Cordesman argued.

"US strategic interests require a broad level of stability in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula," the CSIS chief, who serves as unofficial foreign policy advisor to the White House, noted.

"Yemen is of major strategic importance to the United States, as is the broader stability of Saudi Arabia and all of the Arab Gulf states. For all of the talk of U.S. energy 'independence,' the reality remains very different. The increase in petroleum and alternative fuels outside the Gulf has not changed its vital strategic importance to the global and U.S. economy," Cordesman wrote.

Cordesman's point is that historic oil surpluses do not free the US from the need to control the strategic reserves and shipping channels of the region, levers of global power that are essential to US domination over the main European and Asian powers.

Yemen's proximity to two of the most important commercial waterways on the planet, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Straits of Hormuz, make it a linchpin of US regional strategy. Traffic exiting the Persian Gulf must cross through Bab el-Mandeb, which is less than 20 miles across with only two shipping lanes at its narrowest point, before reaching the Suez Canal and SUMED pipeline.

"The Bab el-Mandeb Strait is a chokepoint between the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, and it is a strategic link between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean," Cordesman noted.

Control over even small portions of Yemen by hostile forces could threaten key US allied regimes in Riyadh and Cairo, calling into question both "the economic stability of [the US-backed military dictatorship in] Egypt," and "the security of Saudi Arabia's key port at Jeddah and major petroleum export facility outside the Gulf," Cordesman noted.



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