

Saudi warplanes pound Yemen despite talk of ending aggression

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Saudi warplanes carried out at least 20 air strikes across Yemen Thursday, just two days after a spokesman for the Saudi Arabian military announced that so-called Operation Decisive Storm, which began March 26, had ended and a new phase, described as “Operation Renewal of Hope,” had begun.

The continued bombardment came as UN and Yemeni officials both placed the death toll at roughly 1,000 Yemenis, the majority of them civilians, including at least 134 children.

For millions of Yemenis who have survived the nearly month-long bombing campaign, conditions are growing increasingly desperate.

“The country is going completely down the drain, and I don’t think it is good for anybody to have Yemen completely collapse and in total chaos,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres told *Foreign Policy* in an interview late Wednesday.

The head of Middle East operations for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) described the destruction inflicted on the country as “shocking.”

Speaking after a three-day visit to the impoverished country, the ICRC’s Robert Mardini said, “Nowhere is safe in Yemen today. Nearly a month of death and destruction after years of crisis leaves little hope for Yemenis to lead a normal life.”

Describing the humanitarian catastrophe in the capital of Sana’a, he said there was “no electricity, no water, no food, no public services, no garbage collection.” He added that children “are traumatized by the air strikes at night.”

In the latest round of bombings, at least 20 people were killed in the northwestern city of al-Dhale, where Saudi warplanes targeted two schools and a gym.

Even before the dropping of some 3,500 bombs on its

cities, Yemen was the poorest country in the Middle East, with some 16 million people—over 60 percent of the population—dependent upon aid for their survival. A US-backed Saudi blockade has cut off that aid.

The brutal bombing campaign has led to increasing charges of war crimes, as Saudi warplanes have struck schools, hospitals, residential neighborhoods and a dairy factory, where 31 workers were killed.

The New York-based group Human Rights Watch warned Thursday that the Saudi-led air assault appeared to involve war crimes in the deliberate targeting of “civilians and civilian objects” and the impeding of humanitarian aid to the civilian population.

It cited in particular the bombing on April 18 of a warehouse facility of the British-based charity Oxfam in the northern city of Sadaa.

“Destroying an aid group warehouse harms many civilians not even near the strike zone and threatens aid delivery everywhere in Yemen,” said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East and North Africa director for Human Rights Watch.

Oxfam’s Yemen country director, Grace Ommer, denounced the strike on the warehouse as “an absolute outrage.” She said the aid group had informed the Saudi-led military coalition of the location of its offices and storage facilities.

“The contents of the warehouse had no military value,” she said, noting that material kept there was needed to provide clean drinking water to Sadaa’s population.

The Obama administration is directly complicit in the war crimes against the people of Yemen. It has provided logistical support for the bombing campaign, including the aerial refueling of Saudi warplanes, as well as targeting information and other intelligence. It has also rushed bombs, missiles and other weaponry to

replenish the supplies of the military of Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf monarchical regimes participating in the war.

Washington has backed the war in order to support the dictatorship of the Saudi royal family, which has long functioned as a lynchpin for US domination and reaction in the Middle East.

The goal of the war is to suppress the so-called Houthi rebels (the Ansar Allah insurgency, based among the Zaydi Shi'a population, which makes up between 35 and 40 percent of Yemen's population) and restore to power Riyadh's own stooge, Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. Hadi was installed as president in a 2012 "election" in which he was the only candidate.

While anxious to curry favor with the Saudi monarchy and placate its opposition to the deal being pursued by Washington and the other major powers on the nuclear program of Iran—Saudi Arabia's main regional rival—the Obama administration has appeared to grow increasingly wary of the war, which has accomplished little outside of inflicting mass civilian casualties and further destabilizing Yemen.

Among the principal beneficiaries of the war has been Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Previously portrayed by Washington as the premier terrorist threat to the US "homeland," now, as a vicious sectarian enemy of the Houthis, it has been given tacit support by the Saudis and the US itself.

In an interview with MSNBC late Tuesday, US president Barack Obama acted as if the US was not a participant in the war against Yemen, while indicting Iran for providing supposed aid to the Houthi rebels. Washington has repeatedly charged that the Tehran has supplied arms to the Houthis, while presenting no evidence. Iran has denied the charges.

The Pentagon has dispatched the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt to join eight other US warships off the coast of Yemen amid threats that they could be used to intercept Iranian ships. US defense secretary Ashton Carter refused Wednesday to say whether the US Navy would forcibly stop and board the ships, saying only, "We have options."

While the Obama administration has claimed it supports a negotiated political settlement in Yemen, and the Houthi leadership has indicated that it also sought such a settlement, it is far from clear such a deal can be reached.

The Saudis have insisted talks are possible only if the Houthis first lay down their arms, and that they must restore Hadi to power. Meanwhile, forces in the south of the country that have resisted the Houthis have indicated they have no interest in supporting Hadi or any other central government leader, but rather want to secede from the north.

The filthy character of the war, waged by a group of parasitic oil monarchies against the poorest country of the region, found expression in a message tweeted by Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal, a member of the Saudi royal family and the richest man in the kingdom. He declared that "in appreciation of their role" in the war, he was offering to give "100 Bentley cars to the 100 Saudi [fighter] pilots." The British-made luxury cars sell for roughly \$200,000 each.

The prince's offer provoked an outraged response on Twitter. One Yemeni replied, "100 Bentley cars to 100 pilots who bombed Yemen. Not a single ambulance to its hospitals they devastated."

Another Yemeni, who had posted photographs of his bomb-ravaged apartment and his children looking out at the rubble of Sana'a, wrote, "Glad I'm alive. But who's paying for all this mess? I get blown up, pilots get the Bentleys. Unfair world."



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