

UN report: Syria faces worst refugee crisis in recent history

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Over four million refugees have fled Syria for Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, North Africa, and Turkey in an effort to escape the violence and chaos produced by years of civil war, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

One-sixth of the total Syrian population has fled the country and some 230,000 have been killed as a result of the conflict that has raged since 2011, according to the UN estimates.

Desperate and terrified refugees have flooded into a swathe of neighboring countries, with nearly 2 million Syrians having fled into Turkey, 250,000 into Iraq, 630,000 into Jordan, 1.2 million into Lebanon, 130,000 into Egypt, and 25,000 into North Africa.

At least 7.6 million more have been internally displaced, and are living as de facto refugees within Syria, the UN found. In the case of Aleppo, one of Syria's largest cities and home to some 3 million at the beginning of 2011, some 90 percent of inhabitants have abandoned their homes. The total of displaced Syrians has grown by over 1 million refugees in the past 10 months alone.

Waged under humanitarian pretexts, the imperialist wars and interventions of the past decade have transformed Syria, Iraq and the broader region into the epicenter of the worst humanitarian and refugee crisis in history.

According to the UN refugee office, Syria now stands out as having the largest number of refugees in recent history. The situation has become even more dire than that prevailing in Afghanistan in 1992, the UN report states. By that time some 4.5 million Afghans had been driven from their homes by a decade-long guerrilla war, which, like that in Syria, was also instigated by US imperialism.

“This is the biggest refugee population from a single

conflict in a generation. It is a population that deserves the support of the world but is instead living in dire conditions and sinking deeper into abject poverty,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres in an official statement.

“Almost half of all Syrians have been forced to abandon their homes and flee for their lives,” a UN report had already found last August. The catastrophe imposed upon Syria by US imperialism has worsened continuously since that time, the latest report makes clear.

Only a fraction of Syrian refugees have actually been placed in refugee camps, with the majority left to fend for themselves in slums and ghettos on the margins of Lebanese, Jordanian, and Turkish cities.

Some 750,000 displaced Syrian children, nearly half of the estimated total of 1.5 million, are without any access to formal education, according to the UN.

UN efforts to raise some \$4 billion in aid for Syrian refugees have only succeeded in gathering some 25 percent of this target. The US and European elites have mustered less than 25 percent of the UN request.

Syrian refugees have made up half of the surging cross-Mediterranean migrant population during 2015, according to the UN. Many refugees from the Syrian war are so desperate that they are risking a journey to Europe via Libya, itself a cauldron of US-fomented sectarian warfare. During the crossing, migrants are forced to submit to human traffickers who routinely abuse, rob and enslave their human cargo.

After being driven from their homes by imperialist war, on short notice, for unknown shores and with dim prospects, the vast flood of refugees has become the object of increasingly barbaric mass internment, forced resettlement and border control policies imposed by governments across Europe and Asia.

The European powers are meeting the flow of migrants with counter-insurgency and conventional military operations. The EU now plans to launch airstrikes against suspected trafficking vessels, as part of a broader “Fortress Europe” policy that admits and warehouses a tiny fraction of migrants while forcing the majority back at gunpoint.

Refugees at the Syrian-Turkish border face efforts by the Turkish state to block entry, and are caught between Turkish, Kurdish and Sunni extremist forces engaged in violent clashes for control over border areas.

Lebanon has also begun turning away growing numbers of refugees, together with a growing number of governments worldwide that are refusing any form of asylum to migrants, in violation of international law.

These measures are being implemented in response to the historic explosion of refugee populations worldwide. There were nearly 60 million refugees and internally displaced persons globally as of December 2014, a figure which has skyrocketed by some 20 million during the past four years alone. The international refugee population increased by an average of 42,500 persons per day in 2014.

US imperialism bears primary responsibility for the ocean of humanity undergoing forced migration worldwide. Two and a half decades of intermittent US ground wars, counter-insurgencies, bombing campaigns and occupation in Iraq and four years of US-engineered civil war in Syria have destroyed both countries as functioning societies, leaving broad sections of the population with no choice but to flee their homes.

Beginning in 2011, Washington engineered the destabilization of Syria, arming, training and promoting far-right Islamist militias against the Iranian-allied central government in Damascus, in an effort to overthrow the government of Bashar al Assad and impose a US-controlled satellite regime. Syria’s production of basic foodstuffs has fallen by more than 50 percent since the war began.

The US-backed Saudi war against Yemen is producing social collapse of similarly apocalyptic dimensions, according to recent reports from Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the UN. Equipped with new US weaponry, the Saudi-led coalition has killed thousands of civilians during a heavy bombing campaign that began in late March and continues to the present.

Coalition airstrikes reportedly killed some 200 Yemenis in a single day on Monday, adding to a significant uptick in the number of civilians killed by the Saudi-led campaign in recent weeks, according to HRW.

The months of savage bombardment by Saudi-led forces, supported directly by American military logistics and intelligence units, have completely failed in their goal of restoring the US-Saudi puppet government of Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi to power and defeating the Iran-backed Houthis,

At the same time, the air war has fueled conditions of social breakdown on the order of those produced by the US in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Somalia and Afghanistan. Outbreaks of diseases that had previously been eliminated by modern health care facilities, such as leishmaniasis and dengue fever, have been reported in Syria and Yemen. Some 20 million Yemenis are now struggling to survive without reliable access to food and water, according to a UN report this week.

Undeterred by an endless series of debacles, the response of the Obama administration is responding with a more aggressive region-wide military strategy targeting Syria, Yemen, Iraq and other unnamed countries, according to US officials cited by the *Wall Street Journal* this week.

Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman General Martin Dempsey and Defense Secretary Ashton Carter outlined plans to intensify support for Kurdish and Sunni militant groups on the ground in both Syria and Iraq, and to escalate the air war against both countries, during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing this week.

Dempsey and Carter shared the view, espoused by a chorus of leading senators, that the success of the Iraq-Syria campaign, supposedly waged to destroy the al Qaeda split-off group Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), actually hinges on the removal of Assad from power.



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