

US-backed Saudi strikes in Yemen kill 120 civilians

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Saudi war planes killed at least 120 civilians in a series of airstrikes in the city of Taiz late Friday night. The strikes destroyed buildings that were serving as workers' quarters as well as a nearby agricultural facility.

The attack was only the latest instance of mass killing of civilians in the bombing campaign waged by the Saudi-led, US-backed coalition that began in March.

Despite claims from Riyadh that such events are accidental, a growing body of evidence shows that the Saudi air campaign is systematically targeting civilian areas. The war is aimed at terrorizing the Yemeni masses into opposing the Houthi takeover and acceding to the restoration of US-Saudi control over the country through the re-imposition of the puppet government led by President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.

The mass slaughter of civilians has become "the new trend now of the air strikes from the coalition," a representative from Doctors Without Borders (MSF) told the Associated Press.

"It's a house, it's a market, it's anything," the MSF representative said, referring to the direct targeting of civilian areas by the Arab coalition.

In May, Saudi military officials declared that the Houthi stronghold of Saada would be considered a "military zone," i.e. a free-fire area, and ordered leaflets dropped instructing all civilians to leave the city. UN investigators have argued that the Saudi coalition is knowingly targeting "trapped civilians."

As many as 140 Saudi strikes ripped through areas of Saada on Friday. The strikes intentionally targeted civilian areas where Saudi war planners claim the Houthi insurgents have hidden stores of weapons and ammunition. Further strikes on Friday slammed into residential areas in the coastal town of Mokha.

From all appearances, Saudi pilots have been granted

standing authorization to deploy their bombs against civilian areas.

An Amnesty International press release from July 1, titled "Airstrike and weapon analysis shows Saudi Arabia-led forces killed scores of civilians with powerful bombs," documents the killing of at least 54 civilians by a series of strikes against the cities of Sanaa and Taiz between June 12 and June 16.

In one attack detailed by the report, a 2,000 pound bomb fell directly on a residential suburban home, killing at least 10 civilians.

As a reward for their participation in this bloody air campaign, some 100 Saudi pilots have been offered high-end sports cars.

The humanitarian catastrophe facing the civilian population is now reaching "unprecedented levels," according to a statement from the International Red Cross on Friday. The punishing Saudi assault has contributed officially to the deaths of at least 1,700 civilians in a matter of months, while devastating Yemen's infrastructure to the point where some 80 percent of the population lacks reliable access to food and water.

In the aftermath of Friday's mass civilian deaths, Saudi authorities have called for a five day cease-fire over the weekend, under the pretense of seeking to allow humanitarian aid to enter the country.

There is every reason to believe that the Saudi cease-fire has been called as a tactical maneuver, aimed at gaining breathing space for the Saudi coalition to rearm its bombers and recalibrate its ground strategy. Following the pattern of previous "truces" declared by the Saudis, fighting has continued to rage on the ground in the hours leading up to the official start of the ceasefire.

Houthi representatives have already denounced the

cease-fire as aimed at preparing for “the beginning of a new war,” according to statements cited by the Associated Press.

The Saudi-led war, which has killed thousands of civilians and produced a social cataclysm, is now morphing into a full blown hybrid ground war along the lines of those fomented by US imperialism in Libya and Syria.

The Arab powers are preparing to launch a new ground offensive, utilizing an array of freshly trained proxy forces assembled in areas along the southern coast recently reconquered from the Houthis.

In return for their loyalty, formations of pro-Saudi militants who sided with the Saudi-led coalition and the government-in-exile of Hadi have been outfitted by the Gulf states with hundreds of armored vehicles.

Hundreds of fighters have already received training at new military training camps established on the outskirts of Aden by “advisers” from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE and Jordan.

It is no coincidence that such operations bear the imprint of US-orchestrated machinations throughout the region. From the beginning of the war, US military advisers have been helping to orchestrate the bombing campaign from a Joint Planning Cell embedded with the Saudi coalition’s command element.

In the lead-up to the launch of Operation Decisive Storm in March, the Saudi ambassador to the US submitted a list of targets to be vetted by Central Intelligence Agency Director John Brennan. US Navy vessels have been deployed for months in support of the Saudi blockade of Yemen’s ports.

Washington views the war in Yemen as an opportunity to reshape the regional political order through the development of a new Arab military coalition dominated by its main “regional partners,” in particular Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Gulf monarchies that have been armed to the hilt by the Obama administration.

A new analysis produced by Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a leading think tank of the American military-intelligence establishment, makes clear that beyond its immediate role in prosecuting the war against Yemen, the Saudi-led Arab coalition is being developed as an instrument of US regional hegemony.

In the introduction to his “Arab-US Strategic

Partnership and the Changing Security Balance in the Gulf,” soon to be published in the form of a 600-page book, Cordesman argues that the Gulf war coalition must emerge as a strategic force capable of a range of interventions beyond Yemen.

“The strategic partnership between Arab Gulf states, and with the US and other outside states, must now evolve to both deal with conventional military threats and a range of new threats including ideological extremists, non-state actors, their state sponsors, and a growing range of forces design (*sic*) to fight asymmetric wars,” Cordesman argues.

Cordesman writes that the main political nemesis of the “Arab-US Strategic Partnership” is the government of Iran. He contends that the Arab states should proceed with an aggressive anti-Iranian line in the region, confident in their military superiority over Tehran.

Figures compiled by the CSIS report show that the Gulf states have vastly outspent Iran on armaments and other military expenditures since 2001 by a total of some \$600 billion to \$140 billion in spending by Tehran.

At the same time as it pursues the war in Yemen aimed at intensifying pressure on Tehran, the US has initiated a shift aimed at potentially bringing Iran into alignment with its broader strategy in the Middle East through the recently-negotiated agreement on the country’s nuclear program.



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