

# Saudi onslaught against Yemen continues amid official cease-fire

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13 April 2016

Fighting continued in Yemen's southern city of Taiz amid the official start of a UN-brokered truce Monday. Saudi forces carried out airstrikes, and there were artillery exchanges between the Saudi coalition and Houthi militias.

The stillborn ceasefire comes amid what a consortium of aid groups, in a joint plea for expanded international aid to the war-ravaged country, described as a "catastrophic" humanitarian situation.

More than 80 percent of the population now depends on external aid for basic necessities, including food and water, and nearly 3 million Yemenis have been displaced from their homes since the war began in March 2015. The Saudi-led air and ground war has killed some 6,000 Yemenis, including at least 2,000 youths, among them a growing number of child soldiers. Essential social infrastructure and services face "total collapse," according the UN Children's Fund.

In developments that speak volumes about the hypocrisy and mendacity of the US "War on Terror" —in the name of which US forces have waged covert warfare across Yemen for more than a decade—Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has taken advantage of the US-backed Saudi war to massively expand its political and economic network across a broad stretch of southern Yemen.

Since the beginning of the year-old war, AQAP acquired "very large quantities of sophisticated and advanced weapons, including shoulder-fired missiles and armed vehicles," a Yemeni official told Reuters Monday.

"In the security vacuum [following the launch of the war in spring 2015], army bases were looted and Yemen's south became awash with advanced weaponry. C4 explosive and even anti-aircraft missiles were available to the highest bidder," Yemeni tribal leaders told Reuters.

AQAP now administers a "thriving fuel smuggling

network," based out of Mukalla and Ash Shihr, southern port cities that were seized by the group amid the chaos produced by the launch of the Saudi-led war.

AQAP leaders are enjoying "obscene, unprecedented wealth and luxury," with the group reaping between \$2-\$5 million per day through customs taxes and fuel sales, including sales to government-owned distributors.

"The campaign, backed by the United States, has helped Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) to become stronger than at any time since it first emerged almost 20 years ago," Reuters wrote Monday.

"Al Qaeda in Yemen now openly rules a mini-state with a war chest swollen by an estimated \$100 million in looted bank deposits and revenue from running the country's third largest port," Reuters said.

So strong has AQAP's position in the south become that the group is now reportedly demanding tens of millions worth of bribes from Yemen's major telecommunications companies and national oil corporation.

Already brutally oppressed by imperialism and among the poorest countries in the world, since the start of the Saudi-led war in 2015 Yemen has joined a growing list of Middle Eastern and African countries that have been utterly destroyed and transformed into non-functional societies by US-led wars and proxy wars.

The US military is implicated in horrific war crimes carried out by Saudi forces, including the use of illegal cluster bombs against Yemeni villages, and multiple attacks against crowded civilian marketplaces.

Like Libya and Iraq, Yemen has been targeted by US imperialism and its regional allies due to its strategic value. The US and Saudi Arabia have made clear that they are prepared to employ limitless violence against the tiny nation in an effort to maintain their grip over the crucial waterways of the Bab el-Mandeb straight.

With close support from Washington, Saudi Arabia

called upon a coalition of more than 10 regional states, including United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan and Morocco, to assist in its blood-soaked operations aimed at propping up the Hadi government, which had been imposed by the US and Saudi-controlled GCC during a “democratic transition” process in early 2012.

“Yemen is of major strategic importance to the stability of Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Peninsula,” Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies noted in a report, “The Arab-US Strategic Partnership and the Changing Security Balance in the Gulf.”

The seizure of power by Shia militiamen with alleged links to Iran, Cordesman wrote, “posed the risk that Iran might be able to outflank the Gulf, and deploy air and naval forces into Yemen.”

“Yemen’s territory and islands do play a critical role in the security of a global chokepoint at the southeastern end of the Red Sea called the Bab el Mandab or ‘Gate of Tears,’” Cordesman noted. “Any hostile air or sea presence in Yemen could threaten the entire traffic through the Suez Canal, as well as a daily flow of oil and petroleum products that the EIA estimates increased from 2.9 MMBD in 2009 to 3.8 MMBD in 2013.”

Crucially, at least one-fifth of China’s oil imports flow through Bab el-Mandeb, a fact that prompted Global Risk Analysis to proclaim, at the outset of the war, that “the war in Yemen compromises China’s naval strategy.”

The readiness of US imperialism to back the Saudi assault on Yemen to the hilt ultimately flows in large measure from Washington’s determination to maintain a military stranglehold over a key node in China’s world commercial network, in preparation for confrontation and blockade against Beijing.



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