Thousands protest Saudi bombing that killed and wounded over 700 in Yemen

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Tens of thousands of Yemenis, many of them armed, took to the streets of Sanaa, the country's war torn capital, Sunday to protest the savage bombing of a packed funeral hall the day before by Saudi warplanes. The airstrike left over 700 civilians dead or wounded, representing the worst in a long series of war crimes carried out with the backing of the US, Britain and France.

The demonstrators converged on the United Nations building in Sanaa in an angry denunciation of the world powers for either their direct complicity in the slaughter of the Yemeni people, or their marked indifference to their deepening plight over the course of more than a year and a half of Saudi-led bombardments. Waving rifles and *janbiyas*, the daggers worn by virtually all Yemeni men, the protesters chanted "America is the Great Satan," and called for the deaths of Saudi Arabia's ruling royal family.

Fragments of the bombs dropped on the funeral home bore markings identifying them as US-supplied munitions, part of Washington's multi-billion-dollar arms sales to the Saudi monarchy.

Reports from the scene exposed the horrific character of the attack. The Associated Press quoted a rescue worker as describing the shattered remnants of the funeral hall as a "lake of blood." Body parts, strewn into the streets and even neighboring homes, were collected in sacks.

According to local health officials, the death toll in the airstrike has risen to at least 155, with another 525 wounded. Many of the wounded suffered grievous injuries, some with limbs torn off. The number of fatalities was certain to mount with the pulling of more bodies from the rubble and the deaths of those whom Yemen's vastly over-stressed and under-supplied hospitals prove unable to save. The country's Health Ministry also reported that efforts were still being made to identify "charred remains."

Video released Sunday of the bombing raid made clear that it was the kind of "double tap" strike that the Saudis have employed repeatedly against civilian targets. After first bombing a target, the warplanes wait a short period to allow other civilians and emergency service personnel to arrive on the scene and then attack it again to wipe out both survivors and those seeking to rescue them. The same vicious tactic has been employed by the US military in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere.

Saudi government spokesmen initially denied that the attack on the funeral hall was the work of the Saudi-led coalition, which alone has warplanes flying over Yemen. It suggested that the explosions might have had other causes and even intimated that it could have been the result of a falling out between the Houthi rebels who took control of Sanaa in 2014 and military forces loyal to ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh, with whom they are allied.

Saleh was forced out of office by the revolutionary upheavals that rocked Yemen in 2011, to be replaced by his vice president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who was brought to power in a one-candidate election in 2012, which was boycotted by the Houthis. He in turn was forced to resign and then fled the country after the Houthis seized the capital. He has since resided in Saudi Arabia, functioning as a puppet of the House of Saud.

Later, Saudi officials issued a statement offering "deepest condolences and support to the families of the victims," claiming that Saudi forces do not target civilians and stating that the incident would be investigated.

There is every reason to believe that the attack was premeditated and carried out with the aim of decapitating the Houthi-led authority in Sanaa. The hall that was hit was hosting a funeral for Sheikh Ali al-Rawishan, the father of Galal al-Rawishan, the interior minister in the rebel-led government. Among those reported killed was the mayor of Sanaa, Abdel Qader Hilal, and Maj. Gen. Abdel-Qader Hilal, the head of the capital's local council.

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Al-Rawishan, the interior minister, was reported to have been seriously wounded. Such "targeted assassinations" have been a hallmark of US operations in Yemen.

While Saturday's bombing was the worst atrocity carried out by the Saudis in Yemen, it is by no means unique. Last March, an airstrike on a market in Yemen's northwestern city of Mastaba killed at least 119 people. The deadliest previous attack was September 2015, when Saudi warplanes attacked a wedding party near the Red Sea port city of Mokha, killing 131 civilians. In July 2015, the bombing of a power plant, also in Mokha, killed at least 120 people.

According to the United Nations the number killed since the Saudis launched the war in 2015 has risen to 10,000. Airstrikes by the Saudis and their allies are estimated to have caused two-thirds of the civilian fatalities. Hospitals have been routinely targeted, with Doctors Without Borders (MSF) being forced to abandon the country after four of its facilities were hit. The aid agency stressed that it had given the Saudi military the GPS coordinates of its hospitals. Schools, mosques, refugee camps and residential neighborhoods have also been systematically targeted.

The war pits the Saudi monarchy and allied Gulf oil sheikdoms against the poorest country of the Arab world, which has seen its basic infrastructure reduced to rubble, while its population suffers from mass hunger and disease. An estimated three million people have been displaced by the war, while fully half of the population of 14 million is suffering from hunger. Cholera has begun to claim victims under conditions in which hospitals have been starved of basic supplies by a Saudi blockade enforced under the pretext of halting arms shipments into the country.

Washington's reaction to Saturday's war crime in Sanaa came from National Security Council spokesman Ned Price, who warned that US aid in the Saudi war in Yemen "is not a blank check."

It certainly is not; the figures on the check are well known. Since 2009, the Obama administration has showered $115 billion worth of arms deals and military support upon the Saudi regime. Last year alone saw $20 billion worth of weaponry sent to the country. Washington has continuously resupplied the Saudi military with bombs and missiles to replace those dropped on Yemen.

"Even as we assist Saudi Arabia regarding the defense of their territorial integrity, we have and will continue to express our serious concerns about the conflict in Yemen and how it is being waged," the US spokesman added.

This hypocritical statement is meant to cover up the direct US complicity in the criminal war against the Yemeni people. Without US intelligence and logistical support, not to mention arms sales, Saudi Arabia would be incapable of sustaining its bombing campaign. The Pentagon has fed its forces targeting information, deploying US personnel to a joint command center directing the air war. US military planes have provided aerial refueling for Saudi jets, while the US Navy has helped enforce a blockade that is aimed at starving the population into submission.

Britain has supplied similar support, while also seeking to secure a sizable share of the Saudi arms market.

The muted comments from a junior White House aide over the atrocity in Sanaa stood in stark contrast to the inflammatory rhetoric of US Secretary of State John Kerry late last week describing Russian airstrikes against US-backed and Al Qaeda-linked militias in Syria as "war crimes" meriting an international investigation. Needless to say, Washington would employ all of its power to block any such investigation into the deliberate massacre of civilians in Yemen.

Equally noticeable is the scant attention paid by the US corporate media to the atrocities carried out in Yemen and the vast suffering that has been inflicted upon its people. Feigned moral outrage and humanitarian sympathy is forthcoming from these outlets only when it serves the war propaganda needs of US imperialism.

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