

Assault on boat off coast of Yemen kills over 40 Somali refugees

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An Apache gunship opened fire on a boat carrying Somali refugees off the coast of Yemen early Friday morning killing at least 42 people and wounding dozens of others.

The boat, which came under attack 30 miles off the Yemeni coast, was reportedly ferrying more than 100 men, women and children to Sudan.

Bullets from the attack helicopter riddled the boat ripping through the passengers, many of them women and children. Pictures posted online show the bloodied bodies of the victims being brought ashore. A number of the wounded taken to hospital were missing arms and legs.

Al-Hassan Ghaleb Mohammed, the boat's pilot, told the Associated Press that the panicked passengers scrambled to hold up flashlights in order indicate that they were migrants and stop the surprise attack. All of those on the boat had official documentation from the UN Refugee Agency certifying that they were refugees.

As of this writing, no government has claimed responsibility for the attack, but it was most likely carried out by the Saudi-led coalition which has been waging a brutal war against Yemen for the last two years. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are currently the only militaries flying Apache helicopters in the region, and there were reports of intensified airstrikes in Hodeida Thursday night.

Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf monarchies, with direct military support from the United States, have been waging a brutal war against Houthi rebels who seized control of much of western Yemen in 2015 and ousted the US and Saudi-backed president Abd Rabbo Hadi.

The Saudi-led offensive has so far killed more than 10,000 civilians, targeting hospitals, schools, factories, market places, farm fields and social infrastructure with

airstrikes in an effort to break the Houthi's resistance. A naval blockade of Yemen by the coalition, enforced with the support of the US Navy, has pushed the country, which imported 90 percent of its food stock prior to the war, to the brink of famine.

The US has been waging its own war in southeastern Yemen since 2009, launching drone strikes against targets and individuals purportedly affiliated with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The Trump administration has ramped up the offensive begun by Barack Obama which has already killed hundreds of people, including women and children.

Friday's attack highlights the historic humanitarian crisis which is engulfing a significant portion of the African continent and Middle East, stretching from the Lake Chad region in West Africa to the Arabian Peninsula. The UN warned earlier this week of the largest humanitarian crisis since World War II as 20 million people in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and Nigeria face imminent starvation.

Civil wars stoked by the US government and its European allies combined with historic drought conditions are pushing millions across the Africa continent to flee their homes. It is estimated that at least 5.5 million African are refugees in other countries, and another 11 million are displaced within their own countries.

Even with the ongoing war, which has pushed the country to the brink of a famine, Yemen remains one of the most popular destinations for refugees fleeing war and famine in Somalia. At the end of February there were nearly 256,000 UN recognized refugees from Somalia living in Yemen; this was second only to the more than 317,000 in Kenya.

Tens of thousands of people from across the Horn of Africa transit the Bab el Mandeb strait every year in

order to reach the poorest country in the Middle East. Many of those who flee to Yemen end up in the Khazar refugee camp, a former military barracks located in a hot, desolate desert region two hours north of the southern port city of Aden.

While most intend for Yemen to be a temporary transit point, many thousands have been stuck at the Khazar camp for years on end. The camp currently holds 16,000 people, mostly from Somalia and Ethiopia.

With few employment opportunities for African refugees in Yemen, those who are physically able make the increasingly treacherous trek onwards to Europe. Hundreds of Somali refugees drowned in the Mediterranean in 2016 desperately trying to reach Italy.



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