

Yemenis dying of cholera as Trump meets with UAE ruler

Bill Van Auken**16 May 2017**

Health authorities in the Yemeni capital of Sana'a have declared a state of emergency as a rapidly spreading cholera epidemic has claimed the lives of over 180 people in the span of little more than two weeks. Abdullahkim al-Kuhlani, a spokesman for the health ministry, reported that there have been 11,034 suspected cholera cases reported across several Yemeni provinces.

The disease is rarely seen and easily treatable in populations with ready access to food and clean water. It has the potential to wreak a catastrophic death toll, particularly among children in Yemen. The country's basic infrastructure, including water, sanitation and health care systems, has been laid waste by a US-backed bombing campaign that has been waged by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for over two years.

An estimated 12,000 civilians have been killed with tens of thousands more wounded and millions displaced in this war, which is being fought by the wealthy Arab Gulf oil sheikdoms against the poorest nation in the Arab world.

Saudi Arabia and its fellow reactionary Sunni monarchies intervened in a bid to restore the US- and Saudi-backed regime of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who was installed in a one-candidate election in 2012 and then overthrown three years later by Shiite Houthi rebels allied with military forces loyal to ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The systematic targeting of health care facilities has left barely 45 percent of the country's hospitals still functioning, while the blockade imposed upon the country, with the aid of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, has cut the supply of essential medicines by more than 70 percent.

Two thirds of the population have no access to safe

drinking water, while the cutoff of food imports has placed 17 million Yemenis at imminent risk of famine, while leaving three million malnourished Yemeni children in "grave peril" of death, according to the United Nations. Under these conditions, cholera can spread like wildfire.

In the clearest signal yet that Washington is preparing to substantially escalate the US support for this criminal war—initiated under the Democratic administration of Barack Obama—the Trump White House has organized back-to-back meetings and massive arms deals with the crowned rulers of the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

On Monday, Trump welcomed to the White House Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi and the de facto ruler of the UAE. Trump appeared with the royal dictator in the Oval Office, calling Sheikh Mohamed a "very special, very special person, highly respected." He said that the sheikh "loves his country. And I think loves the United States, which to us is very important." Sheikh Mohamed, whose regime systematically suppresses all political opposition, subjecting its opponents to forced disappearances and routine torture, remained mum.

On the eve of the UAE ruler's visit, the US State Department gave its approval for a \$2 billion deal under which Lockheed Martin and Raytheon will provide the oil sheikdom with Patriot missile systems.

Trump's meeting with Sheikh Mohamed is to be followed at the end of this week by his first overseas trip since taking office. The first stop is Saudi Arabia. As with the UAE, Trump's meeting with the dictatorial Wahhabi monarchy in Riyadh is being accompanied by another massive US arms deal.

A senior White House official told the Reuters news agency last Friday that Washington is close to

completing \$100 billion worth of new arms sales, including advanced missile systems, fighter jets and other heavy weapons. The official added that over the next decade, the sales could amount to \$300 billion.

The weapons sales represent only a slight departure from the policies pursued under the Obama administration, which oversaw the sale of over \$115 billion worth of weapons and military services to the Saudi monarchy. At the same time, it established a “Joint Planning Cell” in Saudi Arabia through which the Pentagon coordinated US military and intelligence support for the Saudi war against Yemen. US planes also provided mid-air refueling of Saudi fighter jets to enable the murderous bombing to continue around the clock.

While the Obama administration provided the bombs and missiles and other aid needed to murder thousands of Yemenis as part of a policy aimed at assuaging Saudi Arabia’s anger over the 2015 nuclear deal reached between Tehran and the US and other major powers, the Trump administration has denounced the agreement and threatened to rip it up.

After a horrific Saudi “double-tap” bombing of a packed funeral hall in Sana'a in October 2016 that left 827 civilians killed or wounded, the Obama administration halted a planned sale of precision-guided munitions as a token gesture, while continuing to provide the support without which the war on Yemen could not have continued.

Such minimal restrictions are now being lifted, and the Trump administration is adopting a relentlessly hostile stance in relation to Iran, which both Saudi Arabia and Washington have charged, without substantiation, of providing major assistance to the Houthi rebels.

In March, US Defense Secretary James Mattis formally requested approval for stepped-up Pentagon support for the Saudi war in Yemen. A memo submitted to the White House claimed that such aid would serve to combat “a common threat” supposedly posed by Iran, US imperialism’s principal regional rival for hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East.

The immediate aim of an increase in US military aid is to support a planned operation by UAE military forces to seize Hodeida, the country’s main port, through which 70 percent of the country’s imports now flow. The taking of the port would tighten the

stranglehold imposed by the naval blockade, potentially condemning millions to death by starvation.

The more far-reaching objective being pursued by Washington is the imposition of US imperialist hegemony across the Middle East through a military confrontation with Iran and the preparation for a global conflict with Washington’s principal rivals, Russia and China.



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