

Tenfold increase in cholera cases in Yemen since April

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The war waged against Yemen by the Saudi monarchy, launched in March 2015 and supported extensively by the United States government, has produced a social catastrophe that easily ranks among the worst war crimes in history. The virtually complete destruction of Yemen's social infrastructure, through deliberate and relentless bombing, has fueled an explosion of hunger and disease that continues to intensify with each passing day.

The past three months have witnessed a meteoric growth of cholera cases throughout the impoverished Arabian Peninsula nation, with outbreaks reported in over 95 percent of Yemen's internal subdivisions, resulting in 1,600 confirmed deaths thus far.

More than 300,000 cases were registered by the Red Cross this month, up from only 35,000 in April. Some 100,000 new cases were recorded during the past two weeks alone. Many of the victims are stranded in the countryside and unable to reach medical facilities.

So systematic and deliberate has been the Saudi assault against Yemen's medical infrastructure that public health experts are describing the Saudi war policies as involving "the weaponization of disease."

The Saudi-led bombing campaign has destroyed or damaged as many as 160 medical centers across Yemen, and fewer than half of Yemen's health facilities remain functional. Saudi forces have actively blocked medical supplies from reaching affected areas. The World Health Organization (WHO) cancelled the delivery of half a million cholera vaccines this week, citing concerns that the scale of the outbreak and the intensity of the violence will make delivery of the medications impossible.

"This cholera scandal is entirely manmade by the conflicting parties and those beyond Yemen's borders who are leading, supplying, fighting and perpetuating the fear and fighting," UN official Stephen O'Brien noted in a statement to the UN Security Council on Wednesday.

"Yemen is facing critical stoppages of hospitals and a

lack of doctors and nurses. The health system has essentially collapsed," O'Brien said.

"All of this is entirely man-made—this is a result of the conflict," UN aid coordinator for Yemen Jamie McGoldrick reiterated.

Two years of bombing and naval blockade have brought normal economic activity to a grinding halt, resulting in the non-payment of salaries and wages, and the widespread breakdown of basic services. In addition to hospitals, Saudi air strikes have regularly targeted markets, residential areas, and education centers.

As a result, more than two-thirds of Yemen's population requires humanitarian assistance, with some 16 million going without reliable sources of clean water. More than 2 million children under five years old are in imminent danger of starvation.

"The humanitarian situation in Yemen is appalling. The people are suffering from war, hunger and cholera, which has spread further during the last few weeks. The country is not suffering from a single emergency but a number of complex emergencies, which have affected more than 20 million people and whose scale and effect will be felt long after the end of the war," UN envoy to Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed said in prepared remarks Wednesday.

Although clothed in the usual rhetoric about "human rights" and "international law," the Saudi war, supported by American imperialism and a coalition of regional allies, including UAE, Morocco, Qatar, Bahrain, Sudan, Kuwait, and Egypt, is motivated by geopolitical considerations, foremost among which is the struggle to control the highly strategic Bab el Mandeb waterway, which connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean.

"Most of the world's crude oil supply from Gulf States passes through the Yemeni port (Bab el Mandeb) to Suez Canal. The route further stretches to the Red Sea and from

there all the way to Europe, USA and North Africa. Approximately 3.3 Million barrels of world crude oil passes through Bab al Mandeb of Yemen to Suez Canal which makes Yemen a strategic trade route,” the Pakistan Alternative Policy Institute noted in a July 9 report.

For the Saudis, the war has also served as the occasion for the establishment of a coalition of Arab nations, the so-called Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism (IMA), which Riyadh aims to employ as an instrument of its power struggle against the government of Iran. With its recent war ultimatums against Qatar, the Saudi government has made clear that the Yemen war represents only the opening phase of its larger regional agenda.

The evident failure of the war in military terms has not deterred Riyadh, which is sponsoring new offensives by Yemeni government troops in Saada and Jawf provinces, and tightening its blockade of Yemen’s coastline.

“Their [Saudis’] plan was to bomb Houthis to submission and that clearly didn’t work. The two-year campaign is a failure. Houthis were not defeated and they are stronger, the country is disintegrating, and Yemen is the world’s worst humanitarian disaster,” Yemen expert Nadwa al-Dawsari recently told *Middle East Eye* .

The Saudi leadership is now reportedly considering the reinstatement of longtime Yemeni dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh. Saleh, who earned the hatred of ordinary Yemenis over many years of oppressive rule, was removed from power in 2011, as part of a US and Saudi-backed transition process.

Under conditions in which the outbreak of mass struggles associated with the “Arab Spring” threatened to divide the Yemeni national military and destroy the regime entirely, Saleh’s removal represented an attempt to salvage a Yemeni state apparatus whose close ties to the Pentagon had been cultivated over decades.

The failure of this policy become clear in early 2015, when Saleh’s successor, Abd Rabbuh Hadi, was forced to flee into exile in Saudi Arabia, after Houthi rebel militias captured the capital city and seized control of his personal residence at gunpoint. The possibility of Saleh’s return to power, after more than two years of bloody warfare waged in the name of returning the “democratically elected” Hadi to power, starkly demonstrates the lying nature of the official justifications put forth for the war.

Despite the formal leadership of the war by Saudi Arabia, final responsibility for the historic crimes unfolding in Yemen lies squarely with the American ruling class and state.

Last month, the US Senate approved the sale of \$500

million worth of advanced weaponry to Riyadh. During the past eight years alone, the Obama administration authorized the transfer of more than \$115 billion in weapons, military equipment and training to Saudi Arabia.

Throughout the Yemen war, American warplanes and intelligence and logistics personnel have aided the Saudi war effort on a daily basis. During its first months in power, the Trump administration approved a renewal of direct ground operations in Yemen by American ground forces.

The trajectory of Yemeni society during the past two and a half decades is a microcosm of the evolution of world history, and in particular of the fate of the ex-colonial countries, during the period following the breakup of the Soviet Union.

The unification of Yemen in May 1990, carried out through the absorption of the Soviet-aligned South Yemen into a political framework dominated by the imperialist-backed northern elites, was supposed to mark the beginning of a new era of democracy and stability. Instead, the intervening period has seen a steady escalation of American military violence against the country, with US drones and commando teams carrying out regular missions from 2001 onward, under the banner of the “Global War on Terrorism.”

Fifteen years of unending war, waged and sponsored in various forms by the United States, have left Yemen utterly shattered, politically, socially, and economically. The “unity” of the nation established amid the breakup of the USSR is today mocked by the ever greater breakup of the country into smaller fragments, controlled by various armed factions. The admonition of UN official Stephen O’Brien, that “we should all feel deeply guilty” for what is happening in Yemen, could just as well read, “we should all feel deeply afraid.” The fate of Yemen only shows, in far advanced form, the future which imperialism is preparing for humanity as a whole.



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