

War in Yemen: Half a million stricken in cholera epidemic

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The number of recorded cholera infections in Yemen this year surpassed half a million on Sunday, in what the World Health Organization (WHO) has called the “worst cholera outbreak in the world.” Some 2,000 people have been killed by the disease since the outbreak mushroomed in April when the sewage system of the capital city of Sanaa suddenly stopped functioning.

While the number of new infections reported per week has begun to somewhat subside due to emergency interventions by the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations, nearly 24,000 new cases were reported last week. The disease has spread to almost every corner of the country, affecting 22 out of 23 governorates.

The conditions for the deadly outbreak have been created by the savage war waged by Saudi Arabia and a coalition of Gulf monarchies, now in its third year, with the full backing of the United States, which has provided intelligence and aerial refueling flights.

Pursuing its stated goal of reinstating the deposed government of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, the Saudi coalition has devastated the already deeply impoverished country with round after round of air strikes and a ground invasion spearheaded by the United Arab Emirates. Hadi fled the country after Houthi insurgents and elements aligned with former dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh took control of significant portions of the country, including Sanaa.

According to the UN, between March 2015 and March 2017 at least 10,000 civilians were killed as a consequence of the Saudi-led assault, accounting for a majority of fatalities. More than 2 million people have been displaced since 2015.

From the outset of the war, the Obama administration made sure that the Saudi armory remained stocked with billions of dollars in bombs, weapons and equipment.

The military support structures put in place by the Obama administration have been maintained and expanded under President Donald Trump.

In March, US Defense Secretary James “Mad Dog” Mattis issued a memo calling for stepped-up US support for the criminal war, which the US is backing as part of its drive to isolate and ultimately topple the regime in Iran.

In May, Trump visited Saudi Arabia and ostentatiously hailed the totalitarian monarchy as a bastion of stability in the region and linchpin in a US-led crusade against Islamist terrorism—the pretext for their joint war for regime-change in Syria and efforts to destabilize Iran. Trump praised Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies for having “taken strong actions against Houthi militants in Yemen.”

In Riyadh, Trump and the Saudi monarchy finalized a number of agreements, including a \$110 billion arms deal that includes an option for the Saudis to purchase \$350 billion worth of US weapons over the next 10 years. Following his visit, Trump backed the Saudi regime and its allies in the region when they imposed sanctions and a blockade on Qatar in an attempt to force that regime to cut off relations with Iran.

It is increasingly clear that the cholera outbreak in Yemen is not an unintended consequence of the Saudi-led war, but is being used as a weapon in the US-backed coalition’s efforts to subjugate the country.

Domination of Yemen is crucial to the control of the Bab el Mandeb Strait, a geo-strategic waterway through which much of the world’s oil must pass.

Coalition air strikes and shelling have deliberately targeted civilian residential areas, hospitals, schools, markets, sewers and other critical infrastructure. This unrelenting assault has made it impossible to properly dispose of trash, which has piled up in the streets.

Individuals contract cholera by consuming water that has been contaminated by human feces. At least 14 million people have been blocked from regular access to clean water by the war, putting them at risk of cholera and other water-borne diseases. The dramatic decline in sanitation conditions and the breakdown in access to water supplies resulting from the Saudi onslaught have fueled the rapid spread of cholera.

With the aid of the US Navy, Yemen has also been subjected to a blockade that has curtailed exports and threatens a collapse in the import of staple foods. Yemen relies on imports to meet more than 90 percent of its grain supply.

Exacerbating the situation, the main international airport in Sanaa has been closed since last year, when the Saudi coalition established a no-fly zone over Yemen. Limited amounts of aid from humanitarian organizations have been allowed into the country via the airport only after the approval of the Saudi monarchy. However, those in need of emergency medical aid available outside of the country have been blocked from leaving.

All of this has pushed Yemen to the brink of famine. The World Food Programme has determined that 17 million Yemenis, more than 60 percent of the country's population, do not have enough food to eat. UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Justin Forsyth reported in July that 1.8 million children are threatened with acute malnutrition and another 385,000 confront severe acute malnutrition.

The humanitarian disaster in Yemen is being compounded by the collapse of the health care system. Forty-nine of the country's 333 districts do not have a single doctor, and health workers nationwide have not been paid in many months.

Last week, it was reported that without a rapid infusion of supplies and money, Yemen's main blood bank, the National Blood Transfusion Centre, would be forced to close its doors, denying life-saving treatment to approximately 3,000 people every month.

Doctors Without Borders recently handed off responsibly for maintaining the facility to the WHO, but supplies have been blocked from reaching the facility by the Saudi embargo. If the blood bank is shuttered, thousands of patients suffering from war wounds, cancer or kidney failure will be condemned to death.

The enormity of the war crimes being carried out in Yemen make all the more stark the silence of the mainstream media, the political establishment and their hangers-on in the pseudo-left. While they clamor for war crimes charges against Bashar al Assad and demand regime-change in Syria, they give a pass to the United States and Saudi Arabia to destroy an entire society, sinking Yemen into one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent history, with no apparent end in sight.



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