

Yemen's cholera outbreak surpasses 600,000

Bill Van Auken
7 September 2017

The humanitarian crisis unfolding in Yemen—the worst in the world—is an “entirely man-made catastrophe,” the product of a the two-and-a-half-year-old Saudi-led and US-backed war of aggression, the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights stated in a report issued on Tuesday.

The war, which has increasingly assumed near-genocidal proportions, has killed at least 14,000 civilians, maimed many thousands more, displaced 2 million and left at least 7.3 million on the brink of famine.

Meanwhile, the country is confronting the worst cholera epidemic on record, with the World Health Organization and Yemen's health ministry reporting 612,703 people infected and 2,048 of them dying from the disease since April. While the spread of the epidemic has slowed over the past two months, there are still 3,000 new cases reported daily.

Shortly after the outbreak of the epidemic, the WHO predicted a worst-case scenario of 300,000 cases within six months. That this estimate has been more than doubled is testimony to the merciless destruction wrought by a massive Saudi bombing campaign, described by the UN as the “leading cause” of death in Yemen, as well as the effects of a sea and air blockade imposed upon the country with the indispensable support of the US Navy.

The Saudi regime has dramatically escalated its bombardment of Yemen, staging 5,767 airstrikes in the first six months of this year alone, compared to 3,936 for all of 2016.

Bombs and missiles, supplied by the United States and delivered by US-made warplanes that are aerially refueled by American tanker planes and guided by US intelligence, have struck, as the UN reported Tuesday, “markets, residential areas, hospitals, schools, funeral gatherings and even fishermen and small civilian boats at sea.”

Airstrikes have demolished the country's infrastructure, leaving 15.7 million people without access to either clean water or sanitation, creating the objective conditions for the spread of cholera.

This was also the conclusion reached by a study conducted by researchers at London's Queen Mary University last month, which found that eight out of ten cholera deaths in Yemen were in Saudi-besieged areas controlled by the Houthi rebels. “Saudi-led airstrikes have destroyed vital infrastructure, including hospitals and public water systems, hit civilian areas, and displaced people into crowded and unsanitary conditions,” the study stated.

The Saudi war is aimed at restoring to power Yemen's fugitive president Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, a stooge of Riyadh who was first installed in a 2012 election in which he was the only candidate for a two-year transitional period that has long since expired. He was forced to flee the country by an alliance of Houthi rebels and forces loyal to the former dictator, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who seized much of the country, including the capital of Sanaa.

The main concern of the Saudi monarchy is that any Yemeni regime not under its control could establish closer ties to Iran, Saudi Arabia's regional rival. Both Riyadh and Washington have charged, without any substantive evidence, that Iran is arming and supporting the Houthis.

The Saudi war enjoyed the support of the Obama administration, which set up a joint command center between the Pentagon and the Saudi military to oversee the war and signed hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of arms deals with the monarchy.

This support has only been escalated under Trump, who staged a visit to Riyadh in May in which he went out of his way to praise Riyadh for its “strong actions against Houthi militants in Yemen” and signed 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.

US Defense Secretary James Mattis likewise issued a memo last March calling for stepped-up support for the criminal war against Yemen, which is seen by the Pentagon as part of the preparation for a US military confrontation with Iran.

Tuesday's UN report called upon the Human Rights Council, the UN body authorized to order major international investigations, to mount such a probe of human rights violations in Yemen when it convenes later this month. The council has repeatedly rejected calls to investigate the war, leaving the matter in the hands of a Yemeni government panel that is an instrument of the Saudi monarchy.

"I have repeatedly called on the international community to take action to set up an independent, international investigation into the allegations of very serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Yemen," said Zeid bin Ra'ad al-Hussein, the UN's high commissioner for human rights, in issuing Tuesday's report. He added, "The reticence of the international community in demanding justice for the victims of the conflict in Yemen is shameful, and in many ways contributing to the continuing horror."

Saudi Arabia, whose ruling monarchy regularly tortures and beheads its political opponents, is a member of the Human Rights Council, where it and the United States have been able to block any critical examination of the Yemen war.

Meanwhile, the UN's World Food Program (WFP) also indicted Riyadh for the catastrophe in Yemen. "Saudi Arabia should fund 100 percent of the needs of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen," the WFP's executive director, David Beasley, said Tuesday. "Either stop the war or fund the crisis. Option three is, do both of them."

The WFP director said that the Saudi blockade of the Red Sea port of al-Hudaidah, through which 80 percent of Yemen's food imports arrived before the war, along with the Saudi bombing of the port's cranes, had "substantially reduced our capacity to bring food in."

The conditions spelled out by the UN agencies constitute war crimes inflicted by the wealthy and reactionary hereditary monarchies of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf oil sheikdoms together with their principal

backers, the United States and Britain, against the most impoverished country in the Arab world.

The same capitalist politicians, corporate media, and various pseudo-left proponents of "human rights" imperialism who regularly denounce the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad and its Russian and Iranian allies for war crimes largely ignore the mass slaughter in Yemen, where an entire population is being subjected to bombardment, disease and starvation.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact