

# The siege of Hodeidah, Washington's war crime in Yemen

**Bill Van Auken****15 June 2018**

The siege of Yemen's Red Sea port of Hodeidah launched by Saudi and United Arab Emirates-led forces at dawn on Wednesday could cost the lives of some quarter of a million people in the crowded city itself, according to a UN estimate, while threatening to kill millions more across the country through hunger and disease.

Inflicting mass suffering upon civilians is the main purpose of the attack on Hodeidah, which is the principal lifeline for food, fuel and medicine for at least 70 percent of the population in a country that depends on imports for up to 90 percent of its food. The aim is to starve the impoverished Yemeni people into submission.

The battle for the city, the most crowded urban area in Yemen, with a population of between 400,000 and 600,000 people, promises to be the bloodiest since Saudi Arabia launched its war against the Yemeni population in March 2015 with the aim of toppling the rule of Houthi rebels and reinstalling the puppet regime of Riyadh and Washington headed by Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.

In the little more than three years since the war began, at least 13,000 have been killed, the overwhelming majority of them civilian victims of Saudi air strikes. The toll exacted by the cut-off of food and medicine and the destruction of basic infrastructure inflicted by the Saudi-led blockade and air war, however, has been massively higher.

Last year alone, some 50,000 Yemeni children starved to death—roughly 1,000 every week—according to the aid group, Save the Children. One million Yemenis are infected with cholera, an epidemic that has claimed the lives of nearly 2,500 people. As part of its preparations for the Hodeidah offensive, Saudi warplanes bombed a cholera clinic run by Doctors without Borders.

This total war against an entire population, of the likes carried out by Hitler's Third Reich three-quarters of a century ago, would be impossible without the uninterrupted support—military and political—of US

imperialism since its outset.

The US, together with its main NATO allies the UK and France, has supplied the planes, warships, bombs, missiles and shells used to devastate Yemen and slaughter its people. In his eight years in office, President Barack Obama presided over some \$115 billion in arms sales to the monarchical dictatorship in Riyadh. The Trump administration, which has sought to forge an anti-Iran axis with Saudi Arabia, the other reactionary Gulf oil sheikhdoms and Israel, has touted arms deals with Riyadh that potentially would amount to \$110 billion.

The Pentagon has given direct and indispensable aid to the Saudi-led onslaught, providing midair refueling for the planes that bomb Yemeni civilians, staffing a joint command center in Riyadh with US intelligence and logistics officers and reinforcing the Saudi-UAE blockade of the country with American warships. Recently, US Green Berets have been deployed with Saudi ground forces to assist in their anti-Yemen operations. Under the banner of the “war on terror”, the Pentagon is waging its own air war in Yemen, conducting at least 130 air and drone strikes in 2017, quadrupling the number in 2016.

The Trump administration gave the go-ahead for the current siege of Hodeidah in the form of a statement from US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announcing that he had spoken with the rulers of the UAE and “made clear our desire to address their security concerns.” Pentagon officials have reported that US officers are helping to select targets in the port city.

Given the scale of the unfolding catastrophe in Yemen and the criminal role played by the US government, it is noteworthy that the American corporate media has largely ignored the siege of Hodeidah, much as it did with the US sieges that reduced the cities of Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria to rubble, killing tens of thousands, or, for that matter, the estimates of the number of civilians killed in the US war to topple Iraq's Saddam Hussein, which

ranged between 500,000 and a million.

Yemen is emblematic of the world situation three decades after the dissolution of the Soviet Union unleashed a period of continuous war and unrestrained imperialist violence.

War crimes on the scale of those committed in the 1930s and 1940s have become almost commonplace. Civilian populations can be massacred; refugees from the US southern border to the Mediterranean can be treated with the methods of the Gestapo; the Israeli military can gun down unarmed Palestinian demonstrators with impunity, defended by Washington--all barely raising an eyebrow in the corporate press.

An exception to the media silence was a pair of shamefaced editorials that appeared Thursday in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Reeking of hypocrisy, both of them expressed a certain amount of unease within the US ruling establishment over the events in Yemen.

The *Times* editorial notes that the war has resulted in “countless civilian deaths, many attributed to indiscriminate coalition bombing attacks.” It adds, “Under international law, these attacks may qualify as war crimes in which the United States and Britain, another arms supplier, are complicit.”

The *Washington Post* warns: “...the United States, which already has been supplying its two allies with intelligence, refueling and munitions, will be complicit if the result is what aid officials say it could be: starvation, epidemics and other human suffering surpassing anything the world has seen in decades.”

That both newspapers of record of the US ruling establishment use the word “complicit” in describing Washington’s role in Yemen has an undeniable significance. In legal terms, complicity means that someone is held criminally accountable for aiding and abetting the commission of a crime.

In the case of Yemen, the complicity is with war crimes on a world historic scale that could never have been committed without the aiding and abetting of US imperialism.

Based on the legal principles and criteria employed in the Nuremberg trials that sent the surviving leaders of Hitler’s Third Reich to the gallows or prison, there are many in Washington who should today be facing prosecution and the fate of life in prison or worse for the crimes committed in Yemen.

This includes not just Trump and those in his administration directly involved in the Yemen

atrocities—Pompeo, Defense Secretary James “Mad Dog” Mattis, Nikki Haley and other top officials in the military and intelligence apparatus—but also their predecessors, Barack Obama, John Kerry, Ashton Carter, Susan Rice and others responsible for initiating the US support for the Saudi-led war.

Based on the Nuremberg precedent, the CEOs of companies like Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Raytheon that have made billions out of supplying the arms used to murder Yemeni men, women and children would likewise be on trial, as would political leaders of both major parties that have supported US policy and representatives of a mass media that has functioned shamelessly as an instrument of war propaganda.

Alongside them in this crowded defendants’ dock, room would have to be made for their British counterparts from the governments of Prime Minister Theresa May and David Cameron along with their respective foreign policy, military and intelligence officials, as well as British arms dealers who have reaped massive profits off of the bloodbath in Yemen.

The reality, however, is that none of the war criminals in Washington and London will be called to account for their crimes in Yemen—or for that matter those in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and beyond—without the mobilization of the American and British working class, united in struggle with the working people of Yemen, the rest of the Middle East and the entire planet. Under conditions in which the mass killing in Yemen and the broader Middle East threatens to coalesce into region-wide and even world war, the fight to build a mass antiwar movement based on the working class and the youth and directed against the capitalist system is the most urgent political task of the day.



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