Assault on port of Hodeidah resumes as US escalates Yemen intervention

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At least 165 people were reportedly killed over the weekend as fierce fighting resumed south of the port city of Hodeidah, which serves as a lifeline for three-quarters of the population of Yemen, a country that depends upon imports for 90 percent of its food, fuel and medicine.

A force consisting of troops of the United Arab Emirates, Sudanese soldiers and Yemeni mercenaries, backed by Saudi air power, began an offensive to take the strategic Red Sea port last month.

The UAE announced a pause in the fighting, supposedly to allow for negotiations by UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths over a plan to turn the port over to UN control as part of a cease-fire agreement. The port and the city of Hodeidah are currently held by the Houthi rebels, who control Yemen's capital of San'aa as well as the most populated areas of Yemen in the country's northwest.

The UAE, the oil sheikdom that has played a major role in ground fighting since it joined Saudi Arabia in attacking Yemen in March 2015, had initially rejected any agreement outside of an unconditional surrender by the Houthis. The pause in the fighting followed fierce battles in which the UAE-led forces suffered serious losses while gaining little territory. The Houthis inflicted casualties as well as destruction of tanks and armored vehicles of the invading force, including through the use of armed drones and landmines.

While the UN envoy Griffiths has held talks with both the Houthis and the UAE and is scheduled to meet today with President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, a stooge of US and Saudi Arabia, who lives in self-imposed exile in Riyadh, a full-scale battle for the port city appears to be resuming.

Abdulmalik al-Houthi, leader of the Ansarullah movement, as the Houthi rebels are officially known, called for a public mobilization to reinforce the fighters who are holding the city of Hodeidah. He charged that the US-backed forces of the UAE and Saudi Arabia were "backing away from deals mediated by UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths to spare Hodeidah port city from an imminent major offensive planned by the coalition."

"Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are using the United Nations as an umbrella to seize control of Hodeidah through baseless justifications," al-Houthi said.

Al-Houthi's statement came two days after the UAE, Sudanese and Yemeni mercenary forces launched a major new attack to overrun the Tuhyata district south of Hodeidah.

In a further sign of preparations for sustained military conflict in impoverished and famine-ravaged Yemen, the UAE armed forces announced Saturday that it is extending mandatory military service for male high school graduates from 12 to 16 months. Those who do not graduate from high school are subject to two years in the military.

The renewed fighting near Hodeidah has heightened the threat of a humanitarian catastrophe. The UN estimates that 121,000 people have already fled the besieged port city, seeking refuge in San'aa and other areas of Yemen that are ill-prepared to receive them.

For the more than half a million people remaining in the city, conditions are rapidly deteriorating. Food is in short supply, while prices for staple goods are skyrocketing. There are also frequent blackouts. The severe damage that has been inflicted upon the city's water and sewage system has raised the specter of a devastating cholera epidemic.

"The fate of 600,000 people hangs in the balance," said Muhsin Siddiquey, Yemen country director for the

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aid group Oxfam. “Slowly but surely the city is being squeezed and the real fear is that this is merely a precursor to an onslaught that will lead to widespread loss of life.”

The United Nations last month warned that as many as 250,000 people could lose their lives if the siege of Hodeidah continued.

The fate of the population of Hodeidah, however, could be eclipsed by a far wider disaster. If the siege stops the flow of food, medicine and other essential supplies through the port city for any significant period of time, the lives of some 8 million people already on the verge of starvation will be at risk.

Since Saudi Arabia launched the war to reinstall the US-Saudi-puppet regime in Yemen in March 2015, some 600,000 civilians have lost their lives or been injured as a result of the conflict, according to the Yemeni Ministry of Human Rights.

Washington has played an indispensable role in prosecuting these war crimes, beginning under the Obama administration with the provision of arms and munitions that have been used against the Yemeni population, the mid-air refueling of Saudi warplanes to allow their continuous bombardment of the country and the creation of a joint command center in Riyadh to provide US logistical and intelligence aid to the assault on Yemen.

This collaboration has only intensified under the Trump administration, which provided the greenlight for the siege of Hodeidah. Washington sees the war in Yemen as part of its broader strategy in the Middle East to forge an anti-Iranian axis consisting of Israel, Saudi Arabia and the oil-rich Gulf sheikdoms.

While the US and its regional allies have claimed that Iran is arming the Houthis and utilizing them as proxy force, they have provided no evidence to substantiate these claims. They view the rule of Yemen by any government that is not a direct puppet of Riyadh and Washington as a threat to US hegemonic interests in the region.

As the battle for Hodeidah and the threat of historic war crimes against the Yemeni people intensify, the US is steadily and secretly escalating its direct military intervention in the country under the cover of the global “war on terrorism.”

A report published by the *Washington Post* notes, “In the first year of President Trump’s term, the United States conducted far more airstrikes against al-Qaida militants in Yemen than it had in previous years … US Special Forces are on the ground here advising the anti-al-Qaida fighters and calling in American airstrikes, a role that has grown as the air campaign has escalated.”

According to the *Post*, “Last year, the U.S. military carried out 131 airstrikes, more than sixfold the tally in 2016, according to the Pentagon’s data.”

While ostensibly directed against Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Islamic State elements, the escalating US intervention, carried out in tandem with the abrogation of the Iran nuclear treaty and growing war threats against Iran, is directed at imposing US domination over strategically vital areas of the Middle East. US support for the siege of Hodeidah has made it clear that American imperialism is prepared to sacrifice the lives of millions in pursuit of these aims.

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