

# UN panel cites massive war crimes in US-backed war on Yemen

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A draft report prepared by a United Nations human rights panel has spelled out in detail the massive and savage war crimes that have been carried out against the people of Yemen in the three-year-old war waged by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates with indispensable military and political backing from Washington.

The report was produced by the Group of Independent Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, a body formed by the United Nations human rights council in September of last year with a year-long mandate to investigate human rights abuses in the impoverished and war-ravaged country.

The group's formation represented a reversal for Riyadh and Washington, which had successfully fought off previous attempts to mount an investigation into the near-genocidal war against the Yemeni people. Nonetheless, the group of experts lacked even the limited power of a full-scale UN commission of inquiry to recommend prosecution for war crimes in the international criminal court.

The report attributes the vast majority of civilian casualties—which it places at 6,475 killed and 10,231 wounded, while admitting that the real toll is far higher—to Saudi air strikes that “have hit residential areas, markets, funerals, weddings, detention facilities, civilian boats and even medical facilities.”

The report comes in the immediate wake of two horrific atrocities in the space of just two weeks that claimed the lives of at least 60 children and over a dozen others. The first took place on August 9, when a Saudi warplane launched a 500-pound bomb against a bus carrying students from their summer camp to a traditional end-of-summer ceremony, killing 40 children and at least 11 others. While Saudi officials denied responsibility for the attack, and the Pentagon claimed it was still investigating the matter, CNN reported from the scene that remains of the bomb dropped revealed it was made by the giant US arms contractor, Lockheed Martin.

This was followed by another murderous attack on women and children fleeing a neighborhood in the besieged port city of Hodeidah on August 23. A Saudi missile struck the truck in which they were riding, killing at least 22 children and four women.

As the report makes clear, these massacres are by no means an aberration.

The Group of Experts reviewed 60 cases in which Saudi air strikes were carried out against residential areas, killing more than 500 civilians, including 84 women and 233 children. It investigated 29 cases in which strikes were carried out against public spaces, including hotels, killing another 300 civilians. It reviewed 11 air strikes targeting marketplaces, killing and maiming hundreds more. It also probed bombing raids staged against funerals and weddings, most infamously the October 2016 attack on Al-Kubra Hall in the city of Sana'a during the funeral of the father of a senior official, which killed at least 137 civilians and injured 695.

Also investigated were air raids against detention facilities, civilian boats carrying both fishermen and refugees, and numerous medical facilities and ambulances as well as “educational, cultural and religious sites.”

The panel also cited the use by the Saudi warplanes of “double strikes,” in which a second attack is carried out against a target quickly after the first in order to kill first responders and others rushing to the scene to help the wounded.

The incidents cited in the report are by no means a comprehensive list of all the air strikes – estimated at over 18,000 – conducted against Yemen over the past three years, but only representative of the carnage that is taking place.

The report uses mealy-mouthed language that conceals the murderous campaign to force the Yemeni people to submit to Saudi domination. It questions the “targeting process” and the “effectiveness of precautionary measures” adopted to protect civilians by the Saudi-led coalition, and expresses “serious concerns about the respect of the principle of distinction” between military and civilian targets.

At the same time, it acknowledges that Saudi warplanes are employing US-supplied precision-guided munitions that “would normally indicate that the object struck was the target.”

Precisely. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and their allies are carrying out a protracted and deliberate massacre of a largely defenseless Yemeni population.

Also cited as a “violation of international human rights law and international humanitarian law,” i.e., a war crime, are the Saudi-led and US-backed “de facto blockades” of Yemen's

borders, as well as its sea ports and airports.

“The impact of these developments on the civilian population has been immense,” the report states, referring to the blockades. “The accessibility of food and fuel has significantly declined, due to increased costs of bringing goods to markets. These costs have been passed on to consumers, rendering the limited goods available unaffordable for the majority of the population. The problem has been exacerbated by the Government’s non-payment of public sector salaries, affecting one quarter of the population, since August 2016. The effects of the price increases coupled with the erosion of their purchasing power have been disastrous for the population.”

As a result, the report adds, “As of April 2018, nearly 17.8 million people were food insecure and 8.4 million were on the brink of famine. Health-care facilities were not functioning, clean water was less accessible and Yemen was still suffering from the largest outbreak of cholera in recent history.”

The blockade has also prevented people from seeking medical treatment that they are unable to secure inside Yemen. Last August, the Ministry of Health in Sana’a reported that 13,000 Yemenis had died from health conditions that could have been treated if the Saudis had not shut down the country’s airports. Just this week, the health minister issued an appeal to suspend the blockade so that victims of the recent bombings, including badly wounded children, could travel to hospitals abroad.

The report also cites as war crimes the systematic forced disappearances, arbitrary detention and systematic torture and rape of Yemenis taken into custody by the Saudi-led coalition, in particular military forces deployed in the country by the UAE.

“At Bir Ahmed Prison, forces of the United Arab Emirates raided the facility and perpetrated sexual violence,” the report states. “In March 2018, nearly 200 detainees were stripped naked in a group while personnel of the United Arab Emirates forcibly examined their anuses. During this search, multiple detainees were raped digitally and with tools and sticks.”

In addition, detainees have been “beaten, electrocuted, suspended upside down, drowned, threatened with violence against their families and held in solitary confinement for prolonged periods.”

The report also cites the rampant torture and rape of refugees, particularly Somalis and Eritreans, at the hands of Security Belt Forces, comprised of Islamist militias deployed by the Saudi-led coalition on Yemen’s borders.

The report concludes that the panel of experts “has identified, where possible, individuals who may be responsible for international crimes, and the list of individuals has been submitted” to the UN’s High Commissioner for Human Rights.

There is no indication, however, that this list includes the names of individual political and military officials without whose participation the war in Yemen would have been impossible. These would include Barack Obama, Donald Trump, James Mattis, Gen. Joseph Votel and many others in

the top ranks of the Pentagon and CIA, as well as the Democratic and Republican parties.

The only oblique reference to Washington’s role is a recommendation that the “international community ... refrain from providing arms that could be used in the conflict in Yemen.”

US support for the Saudi-led war, initiated under Obama, has included not merely supplying the tens of billions of dollars’ worth of US weaponry that has been turned on the Yemeni people, but also indispensable collaboration by the Pentagon in providing mid-air refueling for Saudi warplanes, without which they could not carry out their murderous bombing raids. A joint logistical center has been set up in Riyadh to supply US intelligence for Saudi strikes and, since last December, US special operations troops have been secretly deployed on the ground to aid Saudi forces.

The White House and the Pentagon have no intention of halting their participation in the Yemen war, which they see as part of a region-wide campaign to roll back Iranian influence and establish US hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East.

This was made clear Tuesday by Defense Secretary Mattis at a Pentagon press conference at which he dismissed the recent atrocities that claimed the lives of over 60 children. He claimed that the US was working with the Saudis to reduce civilian casualties, but “we recognize we are not going to achieve perfection.” He referred to the bus full of children blown to bits by an American bomb as a “dynamic target.”

The UN’s “experts” make no pretense of holding Washington accountable for the war crimes in Yemen, just as the international body has done nothing to bring to justice the US officials responsible for the series of wars, from Afghanistan to Iraq to Libya and Syria, that have claimed the lives of millions and turned tens of millions into refugees.

In any genuine accounting for the slaughter in Yemen, as well as the wider sociocide carried out by US imperialism throughout the Middle East, figures like Mattis, Obama, Trump, et al., would be standing in the dock like the surviving leaders of Hitler’s Third Reich in Nuremberg.

Settling accounts with Washington’s war criminals is the task of the American working class, united in struggle with the working people of the Middle East and the entire planet.



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