US wars claim soaring civilian casualties in Yemen and Afghanistan

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28 September 2018

Two reports issued in recent days have provided a searing indictment of the US war in Afghanistan and the US-backed and Saudi-led assault on Yemen. In both countries, civilian casualties are soaring, the vast majority of them caused by US bombs and missiles dropped upon defenseless populations.

Both reports were issued in the midst of the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly, where Trump and his aides set out to bully the entire population of the planet.

In his speech to the UN, Trump indicted Iran for sowing "chaos, death, and destruction" in the Middle East, while portraying Washington as a force for "peace and stability" in the region. The facts, however, show that the greatest force for death, terror and destruction remains US imperialism, whose multiple wars have claimed well over a million lives over the past 17 years.

Trump also absurdly credited the UAE and Saudi Arabia with "pursuing multiple avenues to ending Yemen's horrible, horrific civil war," even as they continued to bombard the country, murdering hundreds of civilians.

A report issued by the Armed Location and Event Data Project (ALEDP) this week has revealed that the number of civilians slaughtered in Yemen has soared by 164 percent since June, when the Saudi-led coalition launched its brutal siege against the Red Sea port city of Hodeidah. August was the bloodiest month, so far, with the International Rescue Committee reporting that nearly 500 people were killed over the course of just nine days.

The International Rescue Committee issued a report based on the ALEDP's findings pointing out that "since 2015, the [US-backed] coalition has undertaken 18,000 airstrikes–one every 99 minutes–one third of which have hit non-military targets." These strikes are responsible for the great majority of the deaths of more than 16,000 civilians since the war began. Tens of thousands more have died from disease and hunger, and an estimated 8.4 million Yemenis are confronting famine.

Washington gave the greenlight for the siege of Hodeidah, which is aimed at cutting off the lifeline for food, medicine and other basic supplies to the majority of the population who live in areas of the country controlled by the Houthi rebel movement that overthrew the US and Saudi-backed puppet regime of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi in 2014.

The United Nations has warned that the siege could claims as many as a quarter of a million lives outright and push millions more over the brink of starvation.

The report also comes just weeks after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo formally certified to Congress that Saudi Arabia and the UAE are taking steps to alleviate Yemen's humanitarian crisis and protect civilian lives. The certification, required under a toothless amendment attached to the US military spending bill, was a condition for continuing the midair refueling that US Air Force tanker planes provide for Saudi warplanes so that they can conduct their round-the-clock bombing of Yemen's population.

The refueling operation is only one of the means by which Washington makes possible the Saudi-led siege of Yemen. The Pentagon provides critical intelligence and targeting assistance from a joint command center in Riyadh and has deployed US warships that back up the Saudi-UAE blockade of the starving country. It also, of course, provides tens of billions of dollars' worth of weaponry being used to attack Yemen.

Pompeo's cynical certification came in the wake of a pair of bloody massacres in August in which Saudi jets struck a school bus in a crowded market area, killing 51 people including 40 children, as well a truck packed with refugees fleeing the siege of Hodeidah, killing four women and 22 children.

The *Wall Street Journal* last week published a report based upon a leaked classified State Department memo, revealing that Pompeo brushed aside concerns expressed by department officials over the bloodbath unfolding in Yemen. He did so based on a warning from his legislative affairs aides that failure to provide the human rights certification "will negatively impact pending arms transfers" and "may

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also negatively impact future foreign military sales and direct commercial sales to the region."

Of particular concern was a deal struck by Raytheon Co. to sell more than $2 billion worth of precision-guided munitions to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. It was a Raytheon missile that annihilated the bus full of school children last month

Nearly half of arms sales by the US–the greatest weapons exporter in the world–now go to the Middle East, with Saudi Arabia its largest customer, accounting for 18 percent of sales. Total weapons exports set a new record in fiscal 2017, rising to $75.9 billion.

While the profit interests of US arms manufacturers are no doubt a critical concern, Washington, under both the Obama and the Trump administrations, has supported the war on Yemen based upon the pursuit of definite geostrategic interests in curbing Iranian influence in the region and pursuing regime change in Tehran.

This policy of reckless aggression has intensified under the Trump administration, which abrogated the international nuclear agreement with Tehran and has imposed punishing economic sanctions that are tantamount to an act of war.

Both Washington and Riyadh see the survival of any regime in Yemen that is not under their thumb as an unacceptable challenge to their dominance of the region and the curtailment of Iran. Both US and Saudi authorities have sought to cast the Houthi rebels who overthrew the US-Saudi puppet regime of President Hadi as Iranian "proxies," while claiming, without any evidence, that Tehran is supplying them with arms.

Meanwhile, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has reported a 52 percent increase in civilian casualties resulting from airstrikes by US warplanes and the US-controlled Afghan air force in the first six months of this year. The number of bombs dropped by the US Air Force has nearly doubled over this period, to nearly 3,000.

The escalation of the 17-year-old US war in Afghanistan claimed the lives of 1,600 civilians between January and June–according to the UN's undoubtedly low count–and forced another 160,000 to flee their homes.

The UNAMA report found tragic fresh confirmation after it was issued with a pair of US bombings that claimed the lives of at least 25 Afghan civilians. The agency reported on Wednesday that 12 people, 10 children and two women, were killed in a bombing in the central province of Maidan Wardak late on Monday. This followed an airstrike on Saturday that demolished the house of a teacher in the eastern province of Tagab, killing 13 civilians, most of them women and children.

On Wednesday, angry residents of the Chardara district of Kunduz Province carried the bodies of the victims of yet another airstrike that killed a 45-year-old woman and two teenage girls into the provincial capital, chanting slogans against the government and the US occupation forces.

"They martyred three women. My son, who is a university student in economics faculty, and my daughter, Atifa, are wounded—they are in a serious condition in hospital currently," Mohammed, a teacher in the village school, told the *New York Times*. "They destroyed my life."

In Afghanistan, as in Yemen, US imperialism is pursuing definite geostrategic interests. The war begun 17 years ago as a supposed response to the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington has from its outset been directed at establishing a US beachhead in Central Asia, near the strategic oil fields of the Caspian Basin and on the border of China. Recent attempts by Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan to jointly broker a peace process in Afghanistan have only fueled Washington's military violence in the country.

The horrific war crimes in both Yemen and Afghanistan and the prospect of millions of Yemenis dying of starvation as a result of US-backed military operations have received virtually no coverage in the US media. Neither are they an issue in the upcoming midterm elections, in which the Democrats are running as no less a war party than the Republicans, advancing a field of ex-CIA and military candidates and demanding a harder line against Russia.

To press its campaign against Iran, Russia and China, US imperialism is willing to sacrifice the lives of millions and is preparing for far bloodier wars. This eruption of US and world imperialism, threatening the destruction of humanity, can be prevented only by the revolutionary mobilization of the international working class to put an end to capitalism.

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