

Saudi bombs kill Yemeni civilians, raising war tensions in Persian Gulf

Bill Van Auken**17 May 2019**

The savage bombing of a civilian neighborhood in the heart of Yemen's capital, Sana'a, on Thursday signals another escalation of the extreme war tensions provoked by US imperialism in the Persian Gulf.

The airstrikes claimed the lives of at least six civilians, including four children, all of them members of the same family. The Yemeni Health Ministry put the number wounded at 71, including 27 children, 17 women and 27 men.

Witnesses at the scene saw a crowd of men pulling bodies from a demolished apartment bloc, lifting the body of a lifeless child and that of a woman wrapped in a white shroud.

The number killed is expected to rise given the severity of wounds caused by the bombing and as the inhabitants of Sana'a continue to dig through the rubble with their bare hands. Shortages of medicines and medical supplies resulting from the US-backed blockade of Yemen also hinder adequate treatment of the wounded.

Saudi bombs and missiles fell on Sana'a's densely populated residential neighborhoods in the early morning hours of Thursday, with the greatest destruction wrought at the intersection of Rabat and Rakas streets.

"I know the street," Yemeni journalist Afrah Nasser told Al Jazeera. "There are no military targets there. There is no excuse for the Saudi-led coalition. It was a deliberate and systematic bombardment attacking civilians."

The Saudi-led war on Yemen is now in its fifth year, launched after Houthi rebels drove out the corrupt government of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, a puppet of Riyadh and Washington, in 2014. It has created the worst humanitarian crisis on the planet in what was already the poorest country in the Arab

world.

Riyadh has been able to wage this bloody campaign only thanks to uninterrupted support from Washington, beginning under the Obama administration and continuing under Trump, which has provided the jets and bombs used to murder Yemeni civilians, midair refueling to allow continuous airstrikes, intelligence on targets and support from the US Navy for a barbaric blockade that has cut off food, medicine and other basic supplies.

A congressional resolution calling for an end to direct US military support for the Saudi-led slaughter was vetoed by President Donald Trump last month, with proponents of the measure having nowhere near the two-thirds majority needed to overturn the veto. Since then, Democratic politicians, who backed the legislation as an empty political ploy aimed at corralling broad antiwar sentiment, have fallen silent on the ongoing US-backed war crimes in Yemen.

Washington backs the Saudi-led war as part of its broader buildup toward war against Iran, which has seen over the past week and a half the dispatch to the region of a battleship-carrier strike group, led by the USS Abraham Lincoln, and a bomber task force, including nuclear-capable B-52s. This has been followed by the deployment of the amphibious assault warship USS Arlington carrying US Marines, warplanes and landing craft, as well a Patriot missile battery.

Tensions have been further escalated by the highly provocative decision to withdraw all non-essential personnel from the gigantic US embassy in Baghdad, based on claims that are not only unsubstantiated, but have been debunked by a top British general in the US "coalition," of an imminent threat from Iranian-backed militias.

The Saudi airstrikes on Sana'a came just two days after the Houthi rebels claimed responsibility for a drone attack that struck pumping facilities on Saudi Arabia's main east-west oil pipeline, calling it retribution for the ceaseless attacks on Yemeni civilians.

The Saudi monarchy, whose air war has killed an estimated 80,000 civilians while demolishing schools, hospitals, factories and housing, denounced the drone attack—which claimed not a single life—as an act of “terrorism” and a “war crime.”

Riyadh insisted that the drone strikes had been “ordered by the regime in Tehran,” a charge that the Houthi-led government in Sana'a vehemently denied.

“We are not agents for anyone,” said Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, the head of the governing Supreme Revolutionary Committee. “We make decisions independently and do not take orders for drones or anything else.”

Both the US and Saudi governments have long claimed, without providing a shred of evidence, that Iran has shipped arms to the Houthi forces, despite the maintenance of a naval blockade that has kept even food supplies from getting into the country. The real concern of both US imperialism and its principal ally in the Arab world is that any government in Yemen that is not fully controlled by Riyadh poses a threat to the reactionary monarchical dictatorship of the House of Saud.

The Saudi monarchy's attitude toward the war buildup in the Persian Gulf was spelled out in an editorial published Thursday by *Arab News*, an English-language broadsheet that serves as a propaganda outlet for the regime. It called for the US to carry out “surgical strikes” against Iran.

It stated: “Our point of view is that they must be hit hard. They need to be shown that the circumstances are now different. We call for a decisive, punitive reaction to what happened so that Iran knows that every single move they make will have consequences.”

On Wednesday, the head of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) delivered a harrowing report to the UN Security Council on the effects of the US-backed, Saudi-led war on Yemen's children. Citing an official tally of 7,300 children killed outright by the violence, Henrietta Fore acknowledged that the “actual numbers are no doubt higher.” Referring to a Saudi air strike that tore

apart a girls school in Sana'a last month, she said, “Imagine the pain endured by the families of the 14 children who never made it home.”

She reported that a child is dying of preventable causes in Yemen every 10 minutes, that 360,000 suffer severe acute malnutrition and that fully half of the country's children under five—or 2.5 million—have stunted growth, an irreversible condition.

Fore's report was followed by UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock, who told the Security Council that the “specter of famine still looms” over Yemen, with 10 million people surviving only on emergency food relief, and that 300,000 people have been affected with cholera in the first four months of this year alone, compared to 370,000 for the whole of 2018.

The immense human suffering wrought by US imperialism and the Saudi regime in Yemen over the past four years would be rapidly eclipsed by a war against Iran, which would drag in the entire region and threaten to ignite a third world war.



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