

US-backed Saudi bombing kills at least 32 civilians in Yemen

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Saudi airstrikes killed at least 32 civilians while wounding another dozen on Saturday, United Nations officials reported.

This latest atrocity in the long list of war crimes by the US-backed Saudi-led forces in Yemen's five-year-old war followed a rare shootdown of a Saudi Tornado jet aircraft Friday as it was carrying out combat operations over Yemen's disputed northern province of Al-Jawf.

The strike was described by Yemenis as a "revenge" attack for the downing of the plane. Those targeted included children who had gathered around the wreckage of the aircraft as well as families in nearby homes. Medical teams reported difficulty in reaching the wounded as Saudi jets continued to circle the area, threatening a "double tap" strike against first responders. Many of the wounded were in critical condition, and the death toll is expected to rise.

The strike came amid a resurgence of fighting following a brief lull that was accompanied by an agreement on a prisoner swap between the Saudi-led forces and the Houthi rebels, who control Yemen's most populous region in the country's north, including the capital of Sanaa.

Describing the latest bombing as "shocking," Lise Grande, the United Nations' humanitarian coordinator for Yemen, stated: "So many people are being killed in Yemen; it's a tragedy, and it's unjustifiable. Under international humanitarian law, parties which resort to force are obligated to protect civilians. Five years into this conflict, and belligerents are still failing to uphold this responsibility."

While the bombing is no doubt a vicious crime against humanity, it is, after five years of such crimes, hardly a shock. Since the war began in March 2015, when the Saudi monarchy intervened in an attempt to

reimpose the unelected puppet government of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, an estimated 100,000 Yemenis have lost their lives and hundreds of thousands more have been wounded. Saudi bombings, including against homes, hospitals, schools, buses and weddings, are blamed for 67 percent of Yemen's civilian casualties.

The Saudi monarchy and its de facto head Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman have enjoyed complete impunity in carrying out the slaughter of the Yemeni people thanks to the unstinting support from Washington, initiated under the Democratic administration of Barack Obama and continued under the Republican Donald Trump. While the United Nations Security Council—where Washington wields a veto—has imposed sanctions against the Houthi rebels, it has approved not a single resolution condemning the wholesale killings carried out by Riyadh.

The US, meanwhile, backs the war of aggression against Yemen with the sale of hundreds of billions of dollars in weaponry to Saudi Arabia, the provision of intelligence used in selecting targets, the training of pilots and the continuous resupply of bombs, missiles and other military hardware. Until November 2018, the US Air Force was providing aerial refueling of Saudi bombers so that they could carry out round-the-clock airstrikes.

The Trump administration's backing for the Saudi war in Yemen is bound up with its attempts to forge an anti-Iranian front based upon the Saudi monarchy, the Persian Gulf Sunni oil sheikdoms as well as Israel. Washington has continuously sought to cast the Houthi rebels as an Iranian "proxy force" and claimed that Tehran is providing them extensive military aid, though it has produced no evidence to support these charges. The war is being waged by the House of Saud because

it fears the emergence of any government on its border that is not directly under its thumb and views the success of the Houthis as a potential inspiration for its own oppressed Shia minority to revolt.

The US-backed Saudi war has produced the worst humanitarian catastrophe on the face of the planet. According to UN officials, 10 million Yemenis are living on the brink of famine, while roughly 80 percent of the country's 24 million people are dependent upon humanitarian aid. The aid group Save the Children estimated last year that at least 75,000 Yemeni children under the age of five have starved to death since the onset of the war.

Meanwhile, the country confronts the worst cholera epidemic on record, with an estimated 1.2 million people infected and at least 2,500 deaths, many of them children. Dengue is also rampant. This is the result not only of the Saudi bombing campaign's destruction of health care, water, sanitation and electrical infrastructure, but also a punishing blockade of the country enforced with the aid of the US Navy.

Despite inflicting such carnage and massive human suffering, the US-backed Saudi intervention is no closer to achieving any of its objectives than it was five years ago. The Houthis have reportedly driven back Saudi-backed forces in the oil-rich province of Marib over the past week, the first time that they have taken territory there since the war began in 2015.

There are also multiple indications that the so-called Saudi-led "coalition," consisting of the United Arab Emirates, Sudan and a collection of mercenary outfits, is disintegrating. Sudan, under the longstanding dictator Omar al-Bashir—toppled in April of last year—deployed, in exchange for Saudi money, an estimated 30,000 troops who were thrown into the most intense fighting and suffered heavy casualties. The minister of information of the country's transitional government announced last week that Sudanese forces are being withdrawn from the country based on the "conviction that military action will not solve the problem but rather make it more complicated."

Similarly, the UAE, which had significant forces on the ground in Yemen, held a ceremony Sunday in Abu Dhabi in which senior members of the royal family greeted hundreds of troops returning from Yemen. The daily *Asharq Al-Awsat* reported that they "constitute the largest number of UAE soldiers serving in the

coalition in Yemen."

Friction between the Saudis and Emiratis broke out last year after the UAE backed forces loyal to the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) and its allied Security Belt Forces militia in taking over the southern port city of Aden and driving out the Saudi-backed elements loyal to the puppet president Hadi. The Hadi government, which is based in Riyadh, has accused the UAE of attempting to control the south and of seizing Yemen's Socotra island.

With or without the Sudanese and the Emiratis, the Saudi monarchy shows no sign of ending the war, nor does Washington indicate any intention of withdrawing its support for the slaughter. The Trump administration reiterated this backing last April when the US president vetoed a congressional resolution that would have required the Pentagon to end direct military support. While the legislation never had any prospect of securing the two-thirds vote in the Senate needed to override a presidential veto, several leading Democratic presidential hopefuls used the measure to make a phony appeal to popular antiwar sentiment in the US.

Similarly, an amendment to the fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization Act that would have barred the US from providing targeting assistance or any direct aid to the Saudi-led war was quietly dropped from the massive \$738 billion military spending bill in December as part of the final deal struck by House and Senate Democrats and Republicans.



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