

Scores killed in Saudi-led airstrikes, highlighting US-Saudi war crimes

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The last few days have seen a sharp escalation in the number of airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition against its impoverished, southern neighbour Yemen, with a series of horrific attacks on civilian infrastructure and buildings that have played no part in the seven-year-long war. The attacks amount to crimes under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

On Friday, a Saudi airstrike on a detention center in Saada, northern Yemen, housing African migrant workers transiting through Yemen to Saudi Arabia, killed at least 82 people and wounded 266 more, with the number of casualties expected to climb as paramedics dig through the rubble.

A separate attack on a telecommunications center in the port city of Hodeidah shut down the country's internet and killed three children playing nearby. Netblocks, which monitors internet blockages, described Yemen as experiencing "a nation-scale collapse of internet connectivity," while the aid agency, the Norwegian Refugee Council, described the strike as "a blatant attack on civilian infrastructure that will also impact our aid delivery."

Earlier this week, the UN said that this month's violence could soon surpass that witnessed in December, when 358 civilians were killed or injured, as a result of an alarming number of airstrikes, drones and rockets used against civilians and non-military targets. According to the humanitarian aid organization Save The Children, the last three months of 2021 witnessed a 60 percent increase in civilian casualties.

There has been ferocious fighting in the Marib and Shabwa districts in southern Yemen, the last regional stronghold of the Saudi-backed government and location of most of the country's oil reserves, as the Houthis reached the outskirts of Marib city. Its fall would signify the definitive end of the regime headed by President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who long ago fled to Riyadh. In the last few days, pro-Hadi fighters, aided by scores of Saudi airstrikes and UAE-funded and trained proxies, including the Giants Brigade, have pushed back the Houthis, killing hundreds of Houthi fighters. This in turn prompted the Houthis to launch a drone attack on Abu Dhabi, capital of

the United Arab Emirates (UAE), on Monday that killed three people and wounded six.

On Tuesday, Saudi air strikes killed 20 people, including several civilians, in the capital and largest city Sanaa, where Houthi websites show horrifying scenes of women, children and the elderly alongside ruined homes, hospitals and clinics without medication and operating theaters lit by flashlights because there is no electricity. Other strikes on water treatment facilities have left more than 120,000 people in the capital without access to clean drinking water.

None of these atrocities could have been carried out without the fighter jets, bombs, weaponry, materiel, training, maintenance and logistical support, including targeting intelligence and aerial refuelling for Saudi planes, supplied by the US and UK. Washington and London have backed the Saudi-led coalition in its onslaught which began in 2015, providing it with political and diplomatic cover at the UN.

While President Joe Biden lifted the Houthis' designation as a "foreign terrorist organization" and made a vague declaration shortly after taking office last year that he would end "American support for offensive operations in the war," US support for Riyadh and the war has continued unabated. The Biden administration refused to order any sanctions whatsoever against Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who ordered the savage assassination and butchering of exiled Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey in October 2018, despite possessing conclusive evidence of his role. Last November, Biden approved a \$650 million weapons sale to Riyadh that included 280 AIM-120C air-to-air missiles for use by Saudi Arabian fighter jets.

On Wednesday, Biden said that ending the seven-year war was "going to be very difficult," which was as good as saying that he would back Riyadh and Abu Dhabi come what may. He went further, adding that he was considering re-designating the Houthis as an international terrorist organization, an act tantamount to starving the people of Yemen into submission, most of whom live in Houthi-controlled areas, since it would make it almost impossible

for humanitarian aid to reach the country.

On Friday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken called Saudi Arabia's foreign minister to emphasize "the US commitment to help Gulf partners improve their capabilities to defend against threats from Yemen."

Saudi Arabia—with the help of its regional allies—launched an air, land and sea assault on Yemen in March 2015, following an uprising by rebels led by the Ansar Allah/Houthi movement that toppled the Hadi government, to restore its puppet power. The ongoing war is part of the House of Saud's efforts to maintain the rule of the Gulf despots and their allies across the peninsula amid seething social tensions that came to a head in the Arab Spring of 2011.

Since then, Yemen has fragmented amid fighting by numerous competing militias, whose alliance and loyalties have repeatedly changed: the north and parts of the south are controlled by the Houthis; the southwest is under the control of the UAE-backed separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC); and the south and east are under the control of the Saudi-backed government, leading to open warfare between the local allies of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The Saudi-led war had by the end of 2021 killed 377,000 people both directly and indirectly through hunger and disease, according to the UN. Four million people have been forced to flee their homes. At least 75,000 children under the age of five have died of starvation, while the world's worst cholera epidemic in modern times has infected 2.5 million and killed more than 4,000.

The war has crippled Yemen's economy, with the central bank split between the rival authorities in Sanaa and Aden, as the rival powers struggle for control over trade flows and fuel taxation. The collapse of the riyal's value in nominally government-controlled areas has pushed the price of imported goods such as food and fuel beyond the reach of most people. As a result, the UN has described the war as causing the world's worst humanitarian disaster.

The naval blockade mounted by the UAE with US naval support with the aim of starving the Yemeni population into submission has compounded the devastating impact of the hundreds of thousands of Saudi airstrikes. Nearly 80 percent of Yemen's 30 million population are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance or protection for their survival.

Last November, the UN said that five million people are on the brink of famine, with almost 50,000 already experiencing famine-like conditions. Nearly 2.3 million children under age five, the highest number ever recorded, are at risk of acute malnutrition. Four out of five children are in need of humanitarian assistance, 400,000 are suffering from severe acute malnutrition and two million are out of school. Last month, the World Food Programme said it was

"forced" to cut aid to Yemen due to a lack of funds and warned there would be a surge in hunger in the coming months.

It is clear that the recent US-backed airstrikes are but the prelude to a total all-out war without even a passing nod to international law prohibiting attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure and crimes against humanity to regain control of Yemen. Yet the response—or to be more precise the silence—of the major powers is striking. No government will call what has happened by its rightful name: a war crime. There is at best merely some tut-tutting over the dreadful scenes of mass carnage and suffering.

While Blinken had condemned the Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia and the UAE on Monday, there was no comment from the State Department about Friday's Saudi-led attacks on Yemen.

The UN secretary general, António Guterres, simply issued a bland statement in response to Friday's attacks, saying "The escalation needs to stop." He added that the airstrikes, as well as others in different parts of the country, had resulted in child casualties and pointed out that "attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, are prohibited by international humanitarian law."

The media's hypocrisy and cynicism know no bounds. The filthy pro-imperialist press remains silent about the crimes committed by US and UK allies in Yemen, as well as in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria—while raising a furor over US and UK reports, without a shred of evidence, that Moscow is planning to stage a "false-flag" operation that will then be used to justify invading Ukraine. In reality, this is just a cover for precisely such an operation by Ukrainian special forces, trained by US military advisers working inside the country, for an attack on Russia.

The reasons the House of Saud gets a free pass are clear. It is a key market for US arms and plays a vital role on behalf of US imperialism in suppressing the working class in Saudi Arabia and throughout the region and supporting Washington's domination in the resource-rich Middle East. It has allied with Tel Aviv in an anti-Iranian axis that threatens to push the region into another catastrophic war. The only answer to this is for the working class to unite across borders in a struggle to take power and disarm the purveyors of death and destruction by means of socialist revolution.



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