

Orwellian Discourse: “War is Peace” in Yemen

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In his essay entitled, “Politics and the English Language,” George Orwell says, “political language...is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.”

Orwell, whose writings are more prescient with each passing year, would wince at the words of Saudi Arabia’s Brigadier General Asiri, who, in a recent press conference, defended Saudi Arabia’s unprovoked war in Yemen by saying, “all we are trying to do is to make sure that there is security in Yemen.” Bombing an already desperately poor country’s infrastructure, destroying its armed forces (the same armed forces that were equipped and trained to fight al-Qaeda by the US), air dropping weapons (now being sold in Yemen’s arms markets), blockading Yemen’s ports (Yemen imports 90% of its food), and hobbling an already struggling economy are hardly ways of ensuring security.

Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to the United States, Adel A. al-Jubeir, has sought to justify the Kingdom’s war in Yemen by arguing that Saudi Arabia—a country that is ruled by an autocratic king and a collection of princes—is fighting to protect the “elected and legitimate government of Yemen,” the government of Abd Rabbuh Mansur al-Hadi.

Hadi, who fled Yemen for Saudi Arabia on 25 March, was “elected” in an election in February 2012 in which his name was the only one on the ballot. There is also the fact that Hadi’s term as president expired in February 2014. According to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) brokered initiative, national elections, including the election of a new president, were to be held in 2014.

To sum it up: an autocracy with a deplorable human rights record (Saudi Arabia’s Sharia courts routinely behead criminals and flog victims of gang rape as well as recalcitrant bloggers) and its partners—which includes the US—are endeavoring to reinstall an ineffectual exiled government of questionable legitimacy and ensure security in Yemen by bombing and starving it into submission.

Hadi and his exiled government are supporting the bombardment of their own country and calling on the Saudis and their allies to intensify air strikes and launch what will likely be a disastrous ground invasion. Of course, these calls for more bombs, more weapons, and more war are being made by men who fled Yemen aboard private jets and are comfortably ensconced in villas in Riyadh. They do not have to worry about being incinerated in their homes, finding food or water, or burying their dead. It is worth citing another quote from Orwell who wrote in *Homage to Catalonia*, ““all the war-propaganda, all the screaming and lies and hatred, comes invariably from people who are not fighting.”

So what fruits is the Saudi led and US supported “Operation Decisive Storm” bearing?

Security is not among them. An estimated 600 people, including at least 80 children, have been killed. According to UNICEF, a hundred thousand additional Yemenis have been displaced since the beginning of "Operation Decisive Storm." Food, medical supplies, and petrol are in short supply across the country and as yet, flights and convoys bringing aid are being blocked. Conditions in parts of southern Yemen are so bad that some Yemenis are fleeing by boat to relatively secure and stable Somaliland and Puntland.

Across southern Yemen, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is on the offensive. AQAP has freed its members from various jails and has raised its flag over Mukalla, a city of nearly four hundred thousand and a major port with critical oil and gas handling facilities. However AQAP and other militant Islamist groups whose ideology differs little from the state sanctioned Wahhabism of Saudi Arabia, are seemingly not targets for those directing "Operation Decisive Storm." The primary targets of the aerial campaign, beyond critical infrastructure, food factories, and refugee camps, are the Houthis, a Zaidi Shi'a group that has had more success at fighting AQAP in the last six months than the US and its drones have had in the last decade.

AQAP was and, in some military circles, still is considered to be the most virulent of the al-Qaeda franchises. Mainstream US media has long trumpeted the idea that AQAP poses a clear and present danger to the US. Hundreds of millions of dollars of US tax payer money has been spent on the "war on terror" in Yemen. Yet rather than calling for a ceasefire and dialogue as the governments of China, Russia, and Iran have done, the US is supporting a war that will, beyond anything else, make sure that Yemen remains a failed state and fertile ground for AQAP and potentially the Islamic State.

It all makes sense in an Orwellian way.

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