

Over 700 Yemeni Civilians Killed and Wounded by US-backed Saudi Airstrikes in December

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The US-backed Saudi monarchy and its allied Gulf oil sheikdoms have dramatically escalated their bombing campaign against Yemen, the poorest nation in the Middle East, killing scores of civilians within the last few days.

In the bloodiest of the airstrikes, Saudi warplanes targeted a crowded marketplace in Yemen's southwestern Taiz province on Tuesday, killing 54 civilians.

While coverage of the bloodbath by the US and Western media has been scarce, Yemen's Al Masirah television network published photos on its website showing the market's bombed-out shops and the dismembered remains of slaughtered civilians. It reported that body parts had been thrown hundreds of yards from the blast sites.

Among the dead were at least eight children. Another 32 people were wounded in the bombing, including six children.

On the same day, warplanes attacked a farm in the al-Tuhayta district of Yemen's western Hodeida province killing an entire family of 14, including women and children.

Yemeni sources reported that Saudi and allied warplanes carried out more than 45 airstrikes on Wednesday targeting several Yemeni cities and killing at least another six civilians, including a family of five whose house was targeted in the port city of Hodeida.

According to the Al Masirah television network the number of Yemenis killed and wounded in Saudi airstrikes since the beginning of December had risen to 600 before the latest round of casualties beginning on Tuesday.

This bloody new phase in the more than 1,000-day-old war by the wealthy and reactionary Arab monarchies against impoverished Yemen is driven by the House of Saud's frustration over its inability to shift the military stalemate and made possible by the unrestrained support from Riyadh's Western allies, principally the US and Britain.

The stepped up bombing campaign has come partly in response to the failure of a Saudi-backed coup by the former Yemeni dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh against his erstwhile allies, the Houthi rebel movement. The abortive effort ended in Saleh's death and the routing of his supporters earlier this month.

Riyadh has also been shaken by the firing of missiles from Yemen targeting both the international airport and the House of Saud's royal palace. Both missiles were brought down without causing any casualties.

Washington has long relied upon the Saudi monarchy as a pillar of reaction in the Arab world, arming it to the teeth and in the process reaping vast profits for US arms corporations.

During his trip to Saudi Arabia in May, US President Donald Trump signed a \$110 billion arms deal with the Saudi regime. While the agreement represented the single largest arms deal in US history, it represented a continuity with the policy pursued by the Democratic administration of Barack Obama, which had struck a \$29 billion agreement to sell F-15s the Saudis—representing the previous largest single US arms deal—and had a total of \$100 billion worth of weaponry slated for sale to the kingdom.

In addition to providing the warplanes, bombs and missiles being used to slaughter Yemeni civilians, Washington is a direct accomplice and participant in the assault on Yemen, a flagrant war crime that has produced the greatest humanitarian catastrophe on the face of the planet. US Air Force planes are flying refueling missions that keep Saudi fighter bombers in the air, while US intelligence officers are assisting in the targeting of airstrikes and US warships are backing a Saudi sea blockade that is part of a barbaric siege of the country aimed at starving its population into submission.

While an estimated 13,600 civilians have lost their lives to the US-backed Saudi military campaign launched in March of 2015, that death toll has been massively eclipsed by the number of lives lost to hunger and disease resulting from the destruction of basic water and sanitary infrastructure, along with factories, farms, medical facilities and other vital resources, and the blockading of food, medicine and humanitarian supplies.

Almost three years into the war, 21.2 million people, 82 percent of the population, are in need of humanitarian assistance, lacking access to food, fuel and clean water,. An estimated 8 million people are on the brink of starvation, while soaring food prices have placed essential commodities out of reach for all but the wealthiest layers of Yemeni society.

The International Committee of the Red Cross announced last week that the number of cholera cases had topped 1 million, the worst epidemic in modern history, while the country has also been hit by an outbreak of diphtheria, a disease that has been almost entirely eradicated in the rest of the world.

The apocalyptic scale of the human suffering in Yemen has moved some in the West to make timid criticisms of the Saudi regime. Thus, French President Emmanuel Macron reportedly called Saudi King Salman on December 24 to advocate a “complete lifting’ of the blockade of Yemen. Macron made no move, however, to amend the 455 million euro arms deal struck with Riyadh by his predecessor, François Hollande, providing weapons being used to murder Yemeni civilians.

Similarly, the United Nations humanitarian coordinator Jamie McGoldrick pointed to the latest mass casualties resulting from Saudi bombings to condemn the “complete disregard for human life that all parties, including the Saudi-led coalition, continue to show in this absurd war.”

The reality is that the overwhelming majority of deaths have been caused by illegal Saudi aggression. The war, from the standpoint of both Riyadh and Washington, moreover, is not “absurd,” but rather part of a broader regional strategy being pursued by US imperialism to prepare for a military confrontation with Iran, which has emerged as an obstacle to the drive

to assert American hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East.

Finally, the *New York Times* published an editorial Thursday saturated with hypocrisy and deceit. Titled “The Yemen Crucible,” it accuses the Trump administration of applying “a double standard” to the catastrophe in Yemen by denouncing alleged Iranian arms support for the Houthi rebels, while “having nothing bad to say” about the Saudi bombing campaign.

The *Times*, a mouthpiece for the Democratic Party establishment, raises the possibility that Iran “could be in violation” of a UN Security Council resolution barring it from the export of missiles and other weapons, and guilty of “escalating a crisis” that could lead to war with Saudi Arabia.

Referring to the recent performance of the US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, who appeared at a US military hangar in Washington with what was claimed to be debris from an Iranian-supplied missile fire by the Houthi rebels at Riyadh, the newspaper acknowledged that the presentation recalled the “weapons of mass destruction” speech delivered by then US Secretary of State Colin Powell to the UN Security Council in preparation for the US invasion of Iraq.

Of course the *Times* supported that war of aggression in 2003 and became one of the main propagandists of the “weapons of mass destruction” lie used to justify it.

The editorial utters not a word of criticism of US arms sales to the Saudi regime—much less about the Obama administration’s initiation of Washington’s support for the war on Yemen—and concludes with claims of seeing signs that the Trump administration is exerting “constructive influence on the Saudis.”

These lies and omissions make clear that if and when Washington embarks on a potentially world catastrophic war against Iran, the “newspaper of record” will once again provide its services as a propaganda organ for American militarism.

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