

US and Saudi Arabia War Crimes, Indiscriminate Killing of Yemeni Civilians

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Is there anyone who believes that Yemeni Lives Matter?

Saudi ground [forces invaded Yemen](#) for the first time in this war on August 27. Officially, the Saudi government characterizes the invasion as an incursion that will be limited and temporary. The Saudi government made similar representations about their [terror-bombing of Yemen](#) that began March 26 and has continued on a near-daily basis to the present.

Other foreign troops have [invaded southern Yemen](#) in support of the ousted Yemeni government.

At the same time as the Saudi invasion, the [ousted Yemeni government](#), now talking tough from the safety of Riyadh, the Saudi capital, says it [won't enter into any peace talks](#) until the other side, which has no air force and no navy, surrenders its weapons and withdraws from disputed territory. This "demand" is consistent with the corrupt UN [Security Council resolution](#) that passed in April, with the support of the US and other countries then waging war on Yemen.

[Saudi Arabia's aggression](#) against Yemen, the poorest country in the region, has been catastrophic for Yemen, which is all-but-defenseless. Backed by eight other Arab dictatorships and the US, the Saudi alliance has committed [uncounted war crimes and crimes](#) against humanity. The [onslaught has killed](#) more than [4,300 people \(mostly civilians\)](#), subjected roughly half the Yemeni population to severe hunger and water scarcity, and laid waste to World Heritage sites among the oldest in the world.

The US-led naval blockade, an act of war, has cut food imports to Yemen, which is not capable of growing enough food to feed its population. The head of the UN World Food Program reported on August 19 that Yemen is on the verge of famine, making the US naval blockade a potential crime against humanity. The UN humanitarian chief has reported to the UN Security Council that "the scale of human suffering is almost incomprehensible." As [reported by ABC News](#):

He said he was shocked by what he saw: Four out of five Yemenis are in need of humanitarian assistance, nearly 1.5 million people are internally displaced, and people were using cardboard for mattresses at a hospital where lights flickered, the blood bank had closed and there were no more examination gloves.

Like most mainstream media, ABC News delivers the suffering with relish, but has a hard

time telling the war story straight, resorting to euphemistic evasions such as: “at least 1,916 civilians have died in the Yemen conflict *since it escalated* on March 26.” [emphasis added] That’s just dishonest. On March 25, the “Yemen conflict” was primarily a civil war (with ISIS and al Qaeda thrown in).

US leadership cultivates a new generation of war criminals

On March 26, the US-backed Saudi alliance turned the “conflict” into an illegal international war, launching saturation bombing of defenseless populations in coordination with the naval blockade designed to starve the rebels into submission. The “conflict” did not, as ABC wrote, escalate itself – the US and Saudi coalition started a new, undeclared, criminal war for which the leading war criminals of eight countries (starting with President Obama) will likely never face accountability, any more than Obama was willing to hold Bush, Cheney, and the rest of the Iraq war criminals to account.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other human rights observers [report war crimes](#) being committed on all sides.

An Amnesty representative said: “All the parties to this conflict have displayed a ruthless and wanton disregard for the safety of civilians.” “All the parties” includes the rebels and the Yemeni-government-in-exile in Saudi Arabia, of course. But it also includes the US, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan, Senegal, Pakistan, and Somalia. If [any of these countries](#) has a peace movement, there is little evidence of it.

US sponsorship of the criminal war on Yemen also includes the provision of [US cluster bombs](#), which have been outlawed by most of the world’s civilized nations. More than 100 countries have signed the international ban on cluster bombs, but the US – like China, North Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel – are not signatories. The US did not participate in negotiations at all. The primary value of cluster bombs is that [they kill civilians](#), and go on killing them long after wars end in places like Cambodia, Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Iraq.

[Human Rights Watch](#) on August 26 called on the US-back Saudi coalition bombers to stop using [cluster bombs in Yemen](#). A human rights research said: “Cluster munitions are adding to the terrible civilian toll in Yemen’s conflict. Coalition forces should immediately stop using these weapons and join the treaty banning them.”

The reality of suffering is way ahead of the reality of US war crimes

The five-sided fighting in Yemen continues without surcease, and media coverage seems to be picking up on the suffering (perhaps following the “if it bleeds it leads” creed, though Yemen doesn’t often lead the news). On-the-ground coverage is hampered by a virtual prohibition of reporters in the country, where, if they get there, they become targets. This is Saudi alliance-enforced policy, supported by the US, along the lines first implemented in the glorious US victory over Grenada.

Alex Potter is a 25-year-old nurse and photographer from Minnesota who moved to Yemen in 2012. [Her photo album of Yemen](#) beautifully and poignantly illustrates the destruction wreaked on the people and places of an ancient part of the world. The album speaks for itself, published on an NPR website. The NPR-written text and Potter’s quotes heartrendingly describe the suffering of mostly innocent people.

But the NPR text treats the catastrophe more like a natural disaster than an actual war that actual people have decided to wage at any cost:

Yemen is at war. Rebels from the Houthi minority group took control of Sanaa and other parts of the country six months ago. Saudi Arabia backs the government that was forced out and has launched airstrikes against the Houthis. Other actors – al-Qaida and ISIS – make it even more complicated.

And in June, the unthinkable happened. The densely populated Old City [of Sanaa], where people have lived for more than 2,500 years, was attacked. Locals blamed an airstrike.

That is less reporting than it is propaganda. “Yemen is at war” is as sanitized as “Yemen had an earthquake” – and it is fundamentally dishonest. Until March 26, “Yemen” was not at war. Yemen was in the midst of the latest of its chronic civil wars over decades. The rebels were apparently winning. So the Saudis took the Yemeni government into something like protective custody and, with US connivance and several allies, started waging undeclared air war on a population and military forces with no air force and little effective air defense. NPR must know all that, and chose not to make it clear.

To say that “locals blamed an airstrike” is almost an obscenity of journalism, as if there’s some other, unmentioned possibility. It’s as if NPR is saying: what do we know, we’re only reporters, and only one of us was on the scene. You’d certainly never know from NPR that the desolation so vividly shown is the direct result of choices made by American policy makers (among others).

The people Potter’s photographs show have nowhere to go. The text mentions that “Doctors Without Borders has called this a ‘war on civilians.’” What NPR fails to tell you is that Yemenis have nowhere to go primarily because there’s a US naval blockade keeping their country contained like an open air prison, enforcing a killing ground which the Saudis and others can – and do – bomb at will.

New war, continuous war for 14 years – NOT presidential issues?

If ANY presidential candidate has said anything substantive in opposition to the US participation in the war on Yemen, it’s not easy to find. It’s not easy to find a presidential candidate in opposition to [America’s 14 years of continuous war](#) in the Middle East and Africa. Years ago, Rand Paul criticized the extensive drone war Obama was waging in Yemen. Paul was correct that the US drone war was illegal and destabilizing for Yemen, but neither point was taken. Yemen’s destabilization by drone contributed to today’s reality, an illegal, multinational, interventionist war on a country in which the “wrong” side was winning a civil war.

In April 2015, when US-supported bombing of Yemen was three weeks old, [Paul criticized US war policies](#) in general, especially as advocated by other Republicans:

There’s a group of folks in our party who would have troops in six countries right now – maybe more.... This is something, if you watch closely, that will separate me from many other Republicans. The other Republicans will criticize Hillary Clinton and the president for their foreign policy, but they would have done the same thing – just 10 times over!... Everyone who will criticize me wanted troops on the ground, our troops on the ground, in Libya. It was a

mistake to be in Libya. We are less safe. Jihadists swim in our swimming pool now. It's a disaster.

Paul went on to say that he supports unspecified "military action" against ISIS, which is operational in at least three countries now (Syria, Iraq, and Yemen). Paul did not address the terror-bombing of the Houthis and others in Yemen.

Democrats appear to be no more interested in American war-making in Yemen than Republicans, even though [al Qaeda has been growing stronger](#) there as a result of the US-backed bombing weakening the Houthi government. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula now [controls part of the City of Aden](#), parts of which are also controlled by the rebels (conflicting reports) and forces fighting for the government-in-exile in Saudi Arabia (these forces include Moroccan troops).

For anti-war activists, Bernie Sanders is generally thought to be the best bet, even though [his record is fairly weak](#) (compared to Dennis Kucinich, for example). World Socialists take a dim view of the democratic socialist candidate's positions on war/peace issues, calling him the "[silent partner of American militarism](#)." Even more bleakly, [Black Agenda Report's](#) Margaret Kimberley argues that "Sanders' candidacy is as grave a danger to the rest of the world as that of his rivals." [In CounterPunch](#), Sam Hussein takes Sanders to task for his support of Saudi Arabia even as it pummels Yemen. One activist group, [RootsAction.org](#), has [an online petition with 25,000 signatures](#) so far, calling on Sanders (a longtime supporter of the F-35 boondoggle) to denounce the madness of militarism:

Senator Sanders, we are enthusiastic about your presidential campaign's strong challenge to corporate power and oligarchy. We urge you to speak out about how they are intertwined with militarism and ongoing war.

Martin Luther King Jr. denounced what he called "the madness of militarism," and you should do the same. As you said in your speech to the SCLC, "Now is not the time for thinking small."

Unwillingness to challenge the madness of militarism is thinking small.

Sanders has yet to respond publicly to the current RootsAction poll. In December 2013, the senator's "Bernie Buzz" online newsletter reported on [another RootsAction poll](#). That one found that 81% of RootsAction's 19,131 members were in favor of Sanders running for president (9% opposed). Currently, his presidential campaign website lists ten major issues - NONE of them are "war," "peace," "militarism," "military spending," "foreign policy," or anything of that sort.

Until at least one of the candidates for "leader of the free world" says loudly and clearly that the US will back off trying to run the world at the point of a gun, Americans will just have to continue living with presidents who think small about making war against anyone who annoys the US by challenging our elitist "national interests" for any reason. And that will mean continuing to outspend the rest of the world on weapons of war. And that will mean continuing to spend more than half the US budget on war and the consequences of war. And that will leave little room for any putatively "socialist" candidate to do much more than nibble at the core corporate socialism that is the heart of the American economy.

William M. Boardman has over 40 years experience in theatre, radio, TV, print journalism, and non-fiction, including 20 years in the Vermont judiciary. He has received honors from Writers Guild of America, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Vermont Life magazine, and an Emmy Award nomination from the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

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