

UN says 27 dying each day in US-led siege of Raqqa

1 September 2017

United Nations Deputy Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Stephen O'Brien told the UN Security Council Wednesday that 27 people are being killed each day by the US-led siege of Raqqa. The Syrian city, controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, has been subjected to unrelenting US airstrikes and artillery bombardment for nearly three months, turning much of it into rubble.

Some 270,000 people have been driven out of the city, turned into homeless refugees, while an estimated 25,000 civilians remain trapped under the American firestorm. They are without food, access to clean water, electricity or medical care. Reports have come out of Raqqa that its residents have been reduced to eating grass and leaves to stave off starvation.

The UN's chief adviser on the prevention of genocide, Adama Dieng, issued a separate statement condemning the "horrendous situation faced by civilians caught up in the offensive to retake the city from ISIS," while the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein charged that "civilians—who should be protected at all times—are paying an unacceptable price."

In other words, a war crime of monstrous dimensions is unfolding in plain sight, while its perpetrator, US imperialism, enjoys complete impunity.

On its Twitter account, the local monitoring group, Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently, posts photographs daily of babies, children, men, women, the elderly and entire families perishing under the US bombs, missiles and shells, along with the utter devastation of the city's residential neighborhoods.

The siege of Raqqa follows close on the heels of the even larger scale war crime consummated this summer in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, once the country's second largest, where the death toll from nine months of bombing and shelling by the US and its Iraqi

government allies has been estimated as high as 40,000.

All of this carnage is virtually blacked out of the US media, which only last year was engaged—in close coordination with the US government—in a full-throated campaign of feigned moral outrage over the Russian-backed offensive by the Syrian government to retake eastern Aleppo from Al Qaeda-linked and US-armed Islamist "rebels."

Then the charge of "war crimes" was repeated incessantly; now there is only silence. Nothing could provide a more devastating exposure of the hypocrisy of "human rights" imperialism, the stock in trade of the Democratic Party, the so-called liberal press and the various pseudo-left groups that orbit around them, chiding Washington for failing to intervene more aggressively on the supposed behalf of the Syrian people.

Behind the lies and hypocrisy about human rights and terrorism, driving the current US interventions in both Iraq and Syria—like the continuous wars waged by US imperialism in the region over the past quarter century—is the attempt by Washington to assert its hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East at the expense of its regional and global rivals and thereby reverse the declining global position of American capitalism by means of military force.

The mass killing in Raqqa is part of an arc of US slaughter, stretching from the Horn of Africa through the Middle East and into South Asia, from Somalia to Afghanistan. US bombings, drone missile attacks and special operations kill missions are daily claiming the lives of innocent and impoverished civilians.

Everywhere, the US military is escalating its operations and changing its rules of engagement to pursue what US Defense Secretary James "Mad Dog" Mattis described earlier this year as "annihilation tactics."

On Thursday, Mattis announced that the Pentagon has begun a major military escalation in Afghanistan, committing what are reportedly another 4,000 American troops to the nearly 16-year-old US war.

The announcement of the escalation came immediately on the heels of the Pentagon's admission that it had "low-balled" the number of troops already in Afghanistan, concealing the real scale of US operations from the American people. Instead of the official tally of 8,448 American troops, there are really 11,000 there today. Whether this includes all the so-called "temporary" deployments of troops rotated in and out is not clear. After the latest escalation, there will be at least 15,000 on the ground in Afghanistan.

While the Pentagon had said that its troops deployed in Iraq numbered 5,000, and in Syria, 500, it now acknowledges that both figures were also deliberate underestimates, with thousands more actually on the ground there as well. The US media slavishly echoed Pentagon figures that it knew to be false.

The Afghanistan escalation will spell a further increase in civilian casualties, which are already spiraling as a result of US operations. The United Nations mission to Afghanistan recorded a 43 percent increase in civilian deaths resulting from US airstrikes during the first six months of 2017 compared to the same period last year.

In three separate strikes beginning on Monday, at least 40 civilians, most of them women and children, were killed by US bombs dropped on Herat and Logar provinces.

Meanwhile, the Pentagon has launched a major escalation of a bloody decades-long intervention in the strategically located but impoverished nation of Somalia, on the Horn of Africa, carrying out a campaign of drone strikes and special operations kill missions. Last Friday, US special forces troops operating with regime elements raided the village of Barire in the early morning hours, capturing 10 civilians and summarily executing them one by one. Outraged villagers brought the bodies, which included women and children, to the capital of Mogadishu to protest the massacre.

And in Yemen, the Trump administration has stepped up the indispensable arms and logistical support that Washington was already providing under Obama to a Saudi-led war that has assumed near-genocidal

proportions. Saudi bombing raids have killed more than 12,000 civilians since the onset of the war in 2015, with the US supplying the bombs and missiles, including cluster munitions, banned under international law.

The latest US-Saudi atrocity occurred on Wednesday when bombs struck an oil tanker and gasoline station, igniting a fire that killed 13 people, all of them burned alive. Last week, an airstrike hit a hotel and three-story apartment building killing some 60 people.

The massive destruction of infrastructure and the blockading of Yemen's ports and airspace have brought the country's 22 million people to the brink of starvation while creating the conditions for the worst cholera epidemic in world history. Fully half a million Yemenis are infected, half of them children. The death toll from the disease has already reached 2,000 and is rapidly rising.

These war crimes are carried out behind the backs of the American people. The multiple and escalating interventions—virtually unreported by the media—are waged without a semblance of Congressional authorization or debate. Both Democrats and Republicans provide unstinting support to American militarism, an essential instrument for furthering the global looting operations of the ruling financial oligarchy.

Massive resources are lavished on the US war machine, while essential public services and social infrastructure are gutted, leaving millions unprotected from and devastated by increasingly frequent catastrophes like Hurricane Harvey.

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