

US-backed Saudi war and blockade puts millions of lives at risk in Yemen

By Niles Niemuth
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The heads of the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the World Food Program (WFP) released a joint statement Thursday demanding the immediate lifting of the Saudi blockade of Yemen, warning that it is putting millions of lives at risk in the poorest country in the Arab world.

On November 6, Saudi Arabia dramatically escalated its nearly three-year war against Yemen by implementing the total blockade of all seaports, airspace and land crossings into the country. The move came in supposed response to the firing of a single missile from Yemen which was shot down near Riyadh's international airport.

The blockade is war crime being carried out in direct violation of Article 33 of the Geneva Conventions, adopted in the aftermath of World War II, which bars the collective punishment of civilians. According to a confidential brief obtained by the *Intercept*, UN experts believe that Saudi Arabia is deliberately blocking the delivery of aid without any legal justification.

Amid calls to lift the blockade, Saudi's ambassador to the UN facetiously announced that ports and airports controlled by coalition backed forces would be reopened, meaning that an overwhelming majority of the country remains under blockade. Hodeida, the port through which 80 percent of humanitarian aid enters the country, is still controlled by the Houthis and therefore remains blocked from receiving shipments of any kind.

WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake and WFP Executive Director David Beasley warned that "untold thousands" will die without access to crucial life-saving medicines, vaccines and food supplies. Even before the crushing blockade was put in place, Yemen was suffering from the worst

humanitarian crisis in the world.

"The clock is ticking and stocks of medical, food and other humanitarian supplies are already running low," they warned. "The cost of this blockade is being measured in the number of lives that are lost."

Their statement reviewed the catastrophe which has resulted from the daily war crimes being carried out by Saudi Arabia with the full backing of the US government. These crimes have been passed over in almost complete silence by the Western press.

Nearly the entire population of Yemen, 20 million out of 28 million people, are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance, 11 million of those in need are children, and nearly 15 million are without any access to basic health care.

Approximately 17 million people do not know where their next meal will come from, and 7 million are totally dependent on food aid to avoid starvation. Some 400,000 children are on the verge of death from starvation, suffering from acute malnutrition. Without treatment 150,000 malnourished children will die in the coming months.

The international aid organization Save the Children reported this week that 50,000 Yemeni children have already died from extreme hunger or disease this year, with more than 130 dying every single day.

The Saudi monarchy, leading a coalition of other Sunni Persian Gulf monarchies with the support of the United States, has been waging a brutal war against Yemen for nearly three years in an effort to push back Houthi rebels and allied forces who seized control of the capital city, Sanaa, in early 2015.

Saudi coalition fighter jets have carried out an unrelenting campaign of bombing, destroying hospitals, schools, marketplaces, factories, ports and residential neighborhoods as well as crucial electrical and water

infrastructure. This campaign has been facilitated by refueling flights, targeting information and other logistical support provided by the United States military, first under Obama and now Trump.

So far, the Saudi onslaught has directly killed more than 12,000, over half of them civilians. Approximately 3 million have been displaced.

The destruction of Yemen's infrastructure and the collapse of its health system has led to the worst cholera outbreak in modern history, with nearly 1 million suspected cases since late last year. More than 2,000 people have died from the waterborne disease, which is easily treatable with access to medication and clean water.

While the number of newly reported cases of cholera has recently been waning, the Red Cross warned Friday that fuel shortages caused by the blockade have put nearly 1 million people in the cities of Hodeida, Saada and Taiz at risk of contracting the disease

An outbreak of diphtheria, a bacterial infection that is easily preventable with proper vaccination, has already claimed 14 lives. While the disease has been almost entirely eradicated worldwide, it now threatens the lives of 1 million children in Yemen as vaccine shipments have been blocked from entering the country.

The Saudi monarchy claims that the Houthis are being funded and armed by Iran, a charge with Tehran has repeatedly denied. Nonetheless, the war is seen by the Saudis and their backers in Washington as a crucial effort to block the emergence of Iran as challenge to Saudi and American dominance over the Arabian Peninsula and the wider Middle East.

Of particular importance to Washington is the fact that Yemen borders the Bab al Mandab strait, a geopolitical choke point through which much of the world's oil shipments must flow.

On Monday, the US House of Representatives passed a nonbinding resolution 366-30 acknowledging the already well-known fact that the US is facilitating the war in Yemen without any congressional authorization. The House resolution will do nothing to ease the suffering of millions of Yemeni men, women and children.

Introduced by Democratic Representative Ro Khanna, the resolution grimly pledged support for Saudi efforts to "improve their targeting capabilities"

and specifically condemned Iran. The resolution also reaffirmed the United States' right to patrol the Bab el Mandab strait and wage war in Yemen under the threadbare guise of the war on terror against Al Qaeda and ISIS.

While a handful of Democratic representatives and senators, including Khanna and Senator Chris Murphy, have postured as critics of the Trump administration's support for the Saudi slaughter in Yemen, the Democrats have no fundamental opposition to the war, supporting every war initiated or expanded by former President Obama, including in Yemen.

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