

Over 5 million children face starvation as US-backed forces attack Yemeni aid port

By Bill Van Auken
20 September 2018

Soaring food and fuel prices and dwindling supplies have driven another million Yemeni children to the brink of famine, bringing the total number of children facing starvation to 5.2 million, the UK-based aid group Save the Children warned in a report issued Wednesday.

The report appeared as the US-backed coalition led by Saudi Arabia and its fellow Persian Gulf oil monarchies announced an escalation of their offensive against the Yemeni port city of Hodeidah, which constitutes the sole lifeline for food, medicine and fuel for some 80 percent of the country's population.

Save the Children warned that any disruption in the supplies flowing through Hodeidah could "cause starvation on an unprecedented scale" and risk killing "an entire generation of Yemeni children."

The United Nations food agency, meanwhile, reported that it anticipates its current estimate of 8.4 million Yemenis confronting famine will rise by another 3.5 million, given rising food prices—35 percent over the past year alone—and the collapse in the value of the country's currency.

"Time is running out for aid agencies in Yemen to prevent this country from slipping into a devastating famine," David Beasley, the executive director of the World Food Program (WFP), warned in a statement Wednesday.

The country is already facing what the UN has termed the worst humanitarian crisis on the planet and the threat of the worst famine in modern history, with the WFP reporting that 18 million Yemenis, almost two thirds of the population, do not know where their next meal will come from.

Conditions have descended to the point that in some areas of the country families are trying to stay alive by eating leaves. In the capital of Sana'a, fuel shortages

have led to streets being emptied of vehicles, leaving people unable to transport the wounded and sick to hospitals.

The UN had attempted to negotiate a humanitarian corridor for badly wounded civilians, cancer patients and others who will lose their lives unless they are transported out of the country for medical treatment. But the US-backed Saudi-led coalition has refused to allow planes to transport these people from Sana'a. A report that such flights were imminent led to long lines of people in wheelchairs and mothers carrying their dying babies forming outside Yemen's health ministry.

New deaths have also been reported as a result of a cholera epidemic—the worst in modern history—that has affected over a million Yemenis and claimed the lives of well over 2,000.

The threat of mass starvation has intensified with the increasingly violent assault on Hodeidah, a city of 600,000 people, which has come under sustained Saudi bombing. This is combined with a tightening naval blockade and a ground assault by troops of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and various mercenary forces supposedly loyal to the exiled US-Saudi puppet president of Yemen Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi.

UN officials have warned that the siege of the city could claim as many as a quarter of a million lives, while the blocking of aid through the port could kill millions more.

Saudi Arabia and its allies launched their war of aggression against Yemen in 2015 in a bid to reinstall Hadi in the capital of Sana'a by defeating the Houthi rebels who overthrew him. The war has been waged by means of an unrelenting bombing campaign that has destroyed hospitals, schools, marketplaces, factories, ports and residential neighborhoods, as well as crucial electrical and water infrastructure, creating the

conditions for the spread of cholera.

This campaign would be impossible without extensive support from Washington, including the sale of tens of billions of dollars in arms and munitions to Riyadh and its allies, and the provision of midair refueling for Saudi warplanes as well as targeting information and other intelligence and logistical assistance. The US Navy serves as a backup for the punishing naval blockade imposed upon the starving country.

This military aid began under the Obama administration and has continued and intensified under Trump. Last week, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo delivered a pro-forma declaration to Congress, required under a military appropriation bill as a condition for continuing the midair refueling operation, that the Saudi-led coalition was “undertaking demonstrable actions to reduce the risk of harm to civilians.”

The certification followed a series of war crimes, including the August 9 bombing of a bus filled with school children, which claimed the lives of 40 children and 11 others, while wounding another 79, including 56 children. An August 23 strike against civilians fleeing the besieged city of Hodeidah killed 22 children and four women.

The renewed onslaught against Hodeidah has been accompanied by a fresh massacre of innocent civilians. A Saudi coalition warship attacked a fishing boat off Yemen’s Red Sea port of Al Khokha, 75 miles south of Hodeidah, killing 18 of those aboard and leaving only one survivor. The port was seized at the end of last year by forces of the United Arab Emirates, which turned it into a military base.

Washington’s responsibility for this slaughter of civilians has been underscored by documented evidence provided by the Yemeni human rights group Mwatana to the US cable news network CNN. The evidence establishes—through the examination of fragments bearing serial numbers—that bombs and missiles used in attacks that have inflicted mass casualties upon civilians across Yemen have all come from US military stockpiles and have been manufactured by major US arms corporations, including Lockheed Martin and Raytheon. These include cluster munitions—banned by an international treaty that neither the US nor Saudi Arabia signed onto. These weapons spread lethal bomblets over an area the

size of a football field.

The damning evidence is posted on the network’s website under the headline Made in USA: Bombs Used on Yemeni Civilians, but it has not been featured on CNN’s television broadcasts. Other major US media have ignored the evidence.

The escalation of the siege of Hodeidah, with its potential for triggering mass starvation, could be carried out only with the approval of the White House and the Pentagon.

Washington views the savage war against the population of Yemen strictly through the lens of geo-strategic interests. It is seen as a means of countering Iranian influence and asserting US hegemony in the region. US officials have claimed, without presenting any credible evidence, that the Houthis act as a proxy for Tehran and are armed and trained by Iran. In reality, both Riyadh and Washington oppose any government in Yemen that is not their servile puppet.

To press its campaign against Iran and for US hegemony in the region, US imperialism is willing to sacrifice the lives of millions. Top officials in the White House and the Pentagon—from Obama and Trump on down—are guilty of war crimes in Yemen that are comparable to those carried out by Germany’s Nazi regime in the Second World War.

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