

Amid furor over Khashoggi murder, UN warns millions more face starvation in Yemen

By Bill Van Auken
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The United Nations has warned that the US-backed, Saudi-led war against Yemen is threatening to engulf millions more of the impoverished nation's people in the worst famine the world has seen in over 100 years.

Lise Grande, the UN's humanitarian coordinator for Yemen, said Tuesday, "We are literally looking at hundreds of thousands, maybe even millions of people who may not survive."

The World Food Program, the UN agency coordinating relief efforts in the shattered country, reported that it has been forced to revise its estimate, given just two weeks ago, of 8.5 million Yemenis on the brink of famine, stating that another 5.6 million are being driven to starvation by the effects of the three-and-a-half-year-old war on the country's infrastructure and economy.

"Things are deteriorating very, very quickly," said Grande. "The implications are enormous, and, truthfully, frightening. The reality is that time may be running out."

The UN warning came amid the growing crisis over the disappearance and state assassination of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul.

US politicians, both Democrats and Republicans, have joined in denouncing the Saudi regime for the killing of Khashoggi. The journalist went into self-exile in the US a year ago, after serving for decades as an interlocutor between the Saudi regime and the Western media and working closely with Saudi intelligence, including in establishing close ties to Osama bin Laden during the CIA-backed war in Afghanistan.

There is growing speculation that the Saudi ruling monarchy viewed Khashoggi as a "defector" with possible ties to governments and intelligence agencies in the US, Turkey and Qatar, and decided to eliminate him. The ruthless killing of the journalist inside a consulate office in Istanbul is emblematic of the criminality of Washington's principal ally in the Arab world.

Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, a key ally of US President Donald Trump, issued a blustering statement Tuesday to *Fox News*, placing blame on Crown Prince

Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, for the killing of Khashoggi, who was reportedly grabbed, tortured and killed in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2 by a 15-member death squad dispatched from Riyadh. According to Turkish government sources, his body was then sawed into pieces and taken out of the consulate.

Describing himself as the "biggest defender" of Saudi Arabia in the US Senate, Graham distanced himself from Trump, who on Monday floated the absurd alibi for the Saudi regime that Khashoggi may have been the victim of "rogue killers." Graham said that the problem was a "rogue crown prince."

While threatening to cut off arms sales to Saudi Arabia, Graham made no mention of the indispensable military support that the Pentagon is providing to the Saudi-led war against Yemen, including mid-air refueling for its bombers, intelligence sharing and aid in selecting targets, not to mention an inexhaustible supply of planes, bombs and missiles.

The Trump administration has shamelessly defended the Saudi regime in relation to the Khashoggi killing, illustrating its own criminality and readiness to employ similar methods against its opponents. Trump has advanced the "rogue killers" alibi, which media reports indicate may be publicly embraced by the Saudi monarchy, blaming the journalist's death on an interrogation and rendition operation that went awry, i.e., Khashoggi died under torture. Trump has also insisted that his government will not stop arms sales, feigning concern that it would adversely affect "American jobs."

The dispatch of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Riyadh on Tuesday was aimed at solidifying an alibi and exercising damage control over a potential crisis in US-Saudi relations. The *New York Times* reported that the main concern in Washington—which was relayed by Pompeo to the Saudi regime—is that the furor over Khashoggi's killing could cut across US plans to dramatically escalate economic sanctions against Iran that are tantamount to an act of war.

On November 5, sanctions are set to kick in that are designed to cut off all Iranian oil exports and freeze Iran out of the world financial markets by barring any companies doing business with Iran from conducting any business in the US and clearing any of their transactions in US dollars.

Washington, which has forged an anti-Iranian axis with Riyadh and Israel, is counting on the Saudis to boost oil production to compensate for the cut-off of Iranian exports and thereby prevent a spike in oil prices and a potential global economic crisis.

Those within the US ruling establishment clamoring for US sanctions over the Khashoggi killing are driven by their own foreign policy and geostrategic aims, which include concerns that the Trump administration's abrogation of the Iranian nuclear accord has provoked an unnecessary conflict and a distraction from more pressing confrontations with Russia and China.

Washington's cynicism over the Khashoggi murder is matched by that of every major imperialist power—all of which are anxious to preserve their Saudi arms sales—as well as the regimes within the region.

Officials of the Turkish government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan have repeatedly reported that they are in possession of incontrovertible evidence of the gruesome assassination of Khashoggi, including audio recordings. Yet the evidence has not been made public, and Turkish authorities are going through the motions of a joint investigation with the Saudis. Ankara is clearly not anxious to provoke a full-scale confrontation with Riyadh and likely sees the Khashoggi affair as possible leverage in securing economic and political concessions from the Saudi monarchy.

The governments of the Gulf oil sheikdoms, along with Lebanon, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority, have all issued statements solidarizing themselves with the Saudi monarchy.

Meanwhile, the war in Yemen—virtually ignored by the US and Western media—grinds on, threatening to claim the lives of millions. The brazen criminality of Khashoggi's assassination is writ large in the US-backed Saudi war crimes in Yemen, whose innocent victims already total some 50,000, while an estimated 113,000 children have starved to death or died from preventable diseases like cholera, which have spread with the destruction of the country's infrastructure.

Lack of fuel has shut down water systems in the capital of Sanaa, Hodeidah and other cities, leaving some 2.5 million people without access to clean drinking water.

The threat of mass starvation has escalated as a result of the ongoing Saudi-led offensive against the Red Sea port city of Hodeidah, controlled by the Houthi rebels who

overthrew the US-Saudi puppet regime of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi in 2015.

Seventy percent of the food and fuel supplies upon which the Yemeni population depends for survival flow through the port of Hodeidah, which is now under continuous bombardment from air, land and sea. The UN's World Food Program has reported that as a result of the siege, it is unable to access some 51,000 tons of wheat stored at its facility in the port, an amount of grain that could feed 3.7 million starving people in northern and central Yemen for one month.

In one of the latest mass atrocities, a Saudi airstrike on Saturday targeted vehicles at a crowded checkpoint in Hodeidah, striking a bus and killing 17 civilians and wounding another 20, most of them women and children.

The airstrike recalls a pair of similar bloody massacre in August, in which Saudi jets struck a school bus in a crowded market area, killing 51 people including 40 children, as well as a truck packed with refugees fleeing the siege of Hodeidah, killing four women and 22 children. In every instance, the bombs and missiles used in the mass killings were supplied by the US, and the Saudi jets that dropped them were refueled by American tanker planes.

Secretary of State Pompeo brushed aside these mass killings and certified to the US Congress that Saudi Arabia is acting to alleviate Yemen's humanitarian crisis and protect civilian lives. To report otherwise, as an internal State Department memo argued, would "negatively impact future foreign military sales and direct commercial sales to the region."

The same considerations are driving Washington's attempt to fashion an alibi for the Saudi regime and Crown Prince Salman in relation to the brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi.

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