

Fighting reported in Yemeni port, despite cease-fire

By Bill Van Auken
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Residents of the embattled Red Sea port of Hodeidah in Yemen reported Friday that renewed fighting had broken out on the city's outskirts, despite a cease-fire agreement signed just the day before by the US- and Saudi-backed puppet government and the Houthi rebels.

Reuters cited witnesses who reported that the sound of missiles and automatic weapons fire had been heard from the eastern suburb of the Houthi-controlled city, which has been under siege by forces led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) since June.

United Nations agencies and humanitarian aid groups have warned that the siege of the city threatens to tip Yemen, already facing the worst humanitarian catastrophe on the planet, into mass starvation. Some 14 million Yemenis are already on the brink of famine, while the entire population is dependent upon imports for 90-95 percent of its food staples, up to 80 percent of which flow through Hodeidah. Saudi shelling and ground attacks had cut food imports in half and hindered aid groups from accessing and distributing what had already been delivered.

The siege also was the key factor in driving civilian casualties to a record high of over 3,000 in November, roughly the same number as were dying at the height of the Iraq war in 2006. An estimate released Wednesday by a monitoring group, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), placed the death toll from January 2016 (nine months into the Saudi-led offensive) to November at 60,000, with the total from the beginning of the conflict likely to rise to roughly 85,000.

While aid groups and regional powers—including Saudi Arabia, the main aggressor in the conflict, and Iran, which has provided limited support to the

Houthis—expressed optimism that the Hodeidah cease-fire signaled a possible path toward ending the war, previously declared cease-fires have broken down.

There was widespread speculation that the Saudi monarchy was pushed to agree to the cease-fire by growing pressure from Washington, which found its sharpest expression in a pair of resolutions approved by the US Senate on Thursday. The first, passed by a vote of 56 to 41, with seven Republicans joining all the Senate Democrats, invoked the 1973 War Powers Act in calling for an end to US support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen. The second, a non-binding resolution approved unanimously, blamed the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, for the gruesome murder and dismemberment of journalist and former Saudi insider Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2.

The movement on the Yemen resolution, which had languished in the Senate for roughly a year, was largely bound up with the Khashoggi assassination and concern within the US ruling establishment that President Donald Trump's defense of the Saudi crown prince and refusal to acknowledge the incontrovertible evidence of his direction of the killing was discrediting Washington. Fears have grown within both major parties that the acceptance and coverup of this crime serve to rob US imperialism of any ability to posture as a champion of human rights and democracy as it pursues its predatory interests and militarist interventions on a world scale.

While exposing the deep divisions within the US ruling class and its growing concern that the Trump administration's policies are threatening to destabilize and undermine US capitalist interests at home and abroad, the immediate impact of the two resolutions is negligible.

The Yemen measure will not be taken up by the House, whose leadership introduced a procedural measure this week to prevent it from being considered. While the incoming Democratic-led House may take up the resolution next year, Trump has issued a public statement vowing to veto it. Like previous presidents, he has rejected the constitutionality of the War Powers Act as an infringement on the powers of the president as “commander-in-chief.”

Democrats, along with the nominally independent Senator Bernie Sanders, who together with the right-wing Republican senator from Utah, Mike Lee, introduced the resolution, have discovered the slaughter in Yemen only after the election of Donald Trump, and have brought it to the fore only after the assassination of Khashoggi.

The Democratic administration of President Barack Obama initiated US aid to the near-genocidal Saudi war against the people of Yemen, providing mid-air refueling of Saudi warplanes so that they could continue non-stop bombing of schools, hospitals, vital infrastructure and residential neighborhoods, while offering intelligence, targeting information and US naval support for a deadly blockade of the impoverished country.

Similarly, the corporate media largely ignored the slaughter and mass starvation in Yemen until the killing of Khashoggi, who was a US resident and columnist for the *Washington Post*.

Sections of the US ruling establishment see the fallout from the Khashoggi assassination as an opportunity to readjust Washington’s relations with the Saudi monarchy, subordinating it more directly to US domination. While Riyadh has served as a lynchpin for imperialist reaction in the region and as a principal ally in the US anti-Iranian axis—not to mention a major source of profits for US arms manufacturers—the policies of the House of Saud have at times cut across US interests.

As for the war in Yemen, there are clearly no guarantees whatsoever that the ceasefire in Hodeidah signals an end to the brutal war, or, for that matter, that Washington will end its support for the Saudi-led slaughter.

Negotiators for the Houthi rebels claimed the agreement over Hodeidah as a victory in that it leaves the port city under the control of allied local militias

and was the outcome of the inability of forces mobilized by the Saudis and the UAE to take the city.

However, they pointed out that the Saudis had rejected proposals for a nationwide ceasefire, meaning that Riyadh intends to continue its attack on Yemen.

The head of the Houthi delegation, Mohammed Abdul Salam, issued a statement reiterating the demand for “a full withdrawal of all foreign forces from Yemen in accordance with international laws and the Yemeni constitution.”

Neither Washington nor Riyadh is prepared to accept this demand. Without foreign backing, the puppet regime of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, overthrown in 2014, would have no means of asserting power. For its part, the US has insisted that, no matter what level of support it maintains for the Saudi intervention, it will keep its own forces in Yemen under the pretext of combatting Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula, which has functioned as an ally of the Saudis.

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