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European Languages

زبانهای اروپائی

23 December 2017

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25.12.2017

Pentagon admits presence of US troops in Yemen as cholera cases top one million

The Pentagon admitted for the first time this week that it has “conducted multiple ground operations” in Yemen, the impoverished and war-ravaged country on the Arabian Peninsula, while conducting more than 120 air strikes there this year, triple the number in 2016.

This revelation of an escalation on yet another front in the expanding US military intervention in the Middle East came as Yemen marked the 1,000th day of the war being waged by Saudi Arabia and its fellow Gulf oil sheikdoms against the poorest nation in the Middle East.

Multiple aid agencies issued statements warning that the deaths of millions are threatened as the war claims more victims and plunges vast portions of the population into conditions of famine and disease.

The depth of the country’s humanitarian crisis was underscored this week with the announcement by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that the number of cholera cases in Yemen had reached one million, making the ongoing epidemic by far the worst in recorded human history.

The rapid spread of the disease, which has claimed the lives of over 2,200 people since April, a third of them children, is an unmistakable manifestation of the destruction of Yemen’s social infrastructure by the nearly three-year-long, unrelenting US-backed Saudi bombing and blockade of the country.

Cholera is easily preventable and treatable so long as there is access to clean water. US-supplied Saudi bombs and missiles, however, have destroyed much of the Yemen's water and sanitation infrastructure, while the air, sea and land blockade has deprived the country of fuel needed to run whatever systems have survived the onslaught. Meanwhile, at least 50 percent of Yemen's health care facilities have been destroyed.

According to the ICRC, fully 80 percent of Yemeni population now lacks access to food, fuel, clean water and health care, creating the conditions for the spread not only of disease, but also famine.

In a report released Thursday in Cairo, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization said that fully one-quarter of the Yemeni population, nearly 8 million people, was suffering from severe food insecurity, placing their lives at imminent risk. Another 36 percent of the population faced what the agency referred to as "moderated food insecurity."

Prices of what food is available reportedly shot up 28 percent in the month of November alone, placing basic necessities out of reach for the majority of the population.

While 12,000 civilians have been reported killed since the beginning of the war in 2014, this number is vastly eclipsed by deaths from the hunger and disease caused by the war. Last month, the aid agency Save the Children warned that 50,000 children would die before the year's end, while the United Nations has reported that one Yemeni child is dying every ten minutes from preventable causes.

Oxfam, which described conditions in Yemen as "apocalyptic," said in a statement: "For 1,000 days, huge amounts of sophisticated modern weapons have pounded Yemen, and on top of that we are now witnessing a Medieval siege where mass starvation is being used as a weapon of war."

To put it bluntly, Saudi Arabia and its allies and arms suppliers, principally the United States and Britain, are guilty of a world historic war crime that has employed methods against the people of Yemen comparable to those used by Hitler's Third Reich.

Begun in March of 2014, the war has been waged for the purpose of returning the Saudi puppet, Rabbu Mansour Hadi, to the presidency and to prevent the emergence of a government with friendly ties to Iran.

The US ground intervention and air strikes acknowledged by the Pentagon's Central Command on Wednesday are ostensibly directed against Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State in Yemen, Sunni Islamist militias that are virulent enemies of the Houthis, whose base is among the Zaidis, a sect that emerged historically from Shia Islam.

Many of the victims of the US operations are civilians killed in both air strikes and search and destroy missions carried out by special operations troops on the ground. In an unusually publicized raid last January in central Yemen's Al Baydah Province, special operations troops backed by drones and attack helicopters killed 57 people, at least 16 of them civilians, while one American soldier was killed.

Washington has been waging a covert drone war against Yemen since 2002. Before this year, the number of Yemenis killed in this campaign is estimated at nearly 1,500, according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism.

In the same statement acknowledging its ground operations and the dramatic escalation of its bombing campaign, the Pentagon reported that the number of ISIS fighters in Yemen had doubled since the beginning of the year, an estimate that suggests the US campaign is having little impact outside of killing civilians, and is a sideshow compared to the war being waged by the Saudis with Washington's backing.

The Saudi monarchy would be unable to wage this criminal war without the support of the US government and military. Massive US arms contracts have supplied the Saudi Air Force with missiles, cluster bombs and other munitions that have been used to reduce Yemeni schools, hospitals, residential areas, farms, factories and basic infrastructure to rubble. US Air Force planes are flying refueling missions to allow the Saudis to carry out round-the-clock bombing, while intelligence officers are supplying them with targets. The US Navy is deployed off Yemen's coast backing up the Saudi blockade.

While the Trump administration, with the collaboration of the US corporate media, has remained virtually silent on the deepening of the worst humanitarian crisis on the face of the planet, it has repeatedly signaled its support for Saudi Arabia's near-genocidal aggression. It views the war entirely through the prism of its bid to build up a military alliance with Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms, along with Israel, to reverse the growth of Iran as a regional obstacle to the imposition of American hegemony in the oil-rich Middle East.

Washington's support for Saudi Arabia and its determination to provoke a military confrontation with Iran found particularly noxious expression last week when the US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, staged a televised presentation at a military base in Washington, DC in front of the wreckage of what was proclaimed an Iranian missile fired from Yemen at Riyadh's international airport last month. The missile caused no casualties.

Haley insisted that the debris placed on display constituted “undeniable” evidence that Iran is arming the Houthi rebels, violating the 2015 nuclear accord negotiated with the major powers and acting as a “threat to the peace and security of the entire world.”

The presentation called to mind nothing so much as the “undeniable” evidence presented by then US-Secretary of State Colin Powell to the United Nations Security Council in February 2003 of Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction” in preparation for the US invasion little more than a month later.

In this case, the US evidence is every bit as concocted. According to *Foreign Policy*, which viewed a UN report prepared following an examination of the same debris used in Haley’s television appearance, UN investigators found not just Iranian, but also American parts in what was left of the missile, suggesting that the device was cobbled together by the Yemenis themselves.

Unexplained by Haley’s presentation is how Iran could have smuggled missiles into Yemen through a naval blockade maintained by the Saudis and the US Navy that has turned away ships carrying food, medicines and fuel. Moreover, the Yemeni military, whose stockpiles were taken over by the Houthi-led government, had scores of its own missiles.

Responding to Haley’s performance, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Wednesday described the US allegations as “provocative” and “dangerous.” “They try to hide their support for the bombardment of the innocent Yemenis through such accusations,” Zarif said.

On December 19, the Houthi leadership claimed responsibility for another missile fired at Riyadh, declaring that it had been aimed at the Saudi royal palace. Like the earlier missile, it was brought down without causing any casualties.

The White House condemned the abortive missile attack, again claiming without any substantiation that Iran was responsible. US imperialism is supporting and exploiting the slaughter of the Yemeni people to create the conditions for a new region-wide war against Iran with incalculable global consequences.