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## **The U.S. and Yemen: Will Biden End the Nightmare?**

Biden has lots of promises to keep. Or break, if he wants to follow a grand old presidential tradition. Foremost among those to keep is ending U.S. support for the slaughter in Yemen. If Biden backslides on this, he should be fought and stopped pronto. Obama greenlighted this war, Trump stubbornly continued to aid the Saudi bombing campaign, and candidate Biden promised to end it. U.S. arms and military assistance to the Saudi assault have, over four years, pulverized Yemen, the poorest country in the Middle East, unleashing two plagues and famine. Cholera broke out, but even worse was the starvation caused by the Saudi blockade. Even humanitarian aid cannot get in. And this, during a lethal Covid-19 pandemic.

Trump could have ended this nightmare. Congress voted to stop assisting the Saudis militarily, by passing the War Powers Resolution on Yemen, thus giving Trump plenty of cover to retreat from a monstrous, ongoing crime. Congress was partly motivated by the horrific Saudi murder and dismemberment in its Istanbul embassy of *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi. But Trump vetoed that bill in April 2019, and it was no secret that he did so largely to protect lucrative U.S. arms deals with the Saudis. This was particularly despicable given his campaign pledges to end American's pointless forever wars – and Yemen is arguably one of those. But Trump's transactional affection for the Saudi dictator prevailed over the tens of thousands of Yemenis killed by U.S. weapons and U.S.-assisted famine. It was a venal, cowardly veto and an international disgrace. Nothing can excuse it. Had American military aid stopped, so would have the war. Thousands of lives would have been saved. Hundreds of thousands of children, stunted by malnutrition, would have had enough to eat. The whole world witnesses Yemen's agony. It also witnesses U.S. complicity in this crime.

Over 100,000 people have perished in Yemen since Saudi Arabia began bombing it in 2015, in a doomed attempt to dislodge rebel Houthis. More than 85,000 have starved to death. Those are long, slow, excruciating deaths. According to the International Red Cross last

week, roughly 24 million Yemenis need aid and “the majority of the country really needs UN and humanitarian funding in order to meet their basic day-to-day needs.” Aljazeera reports that last month, “Yemen had received less than half of the emergency funds it needed this year...About 13.5 million Yemenis currently face acute food insecurity.” Four million Yemenis have been displaced.

Still, the Saudi attempt to crush the rebel Houthis continues. For a while it seemed the Saudis might relent – that was back in September 2019, when the Houthis launched successful missile attacks on Saudi oil facilities, tankers and airports. These remarkably precise and economically devastating assaults got Saudi attention. The price of shares in the enormous Saudi oil company, Aramco, fell precipitously, as Saudis and the world realized that the tough, determined, supposedly outgunned bands of Houthis could decimate the kingdom’s fossil fuel infrastructure. Temporarily terrified, the aggressor seemed ready to negotiate. Indeed, in November 2019, indirect peace talks mediated by Oman were reported. But now the war blazes on again full blast. The British *Independent* observed in August that 2020 “could be the worst year yet for hunger in Yemen, with millions on the brink of famine.”

Since being elected president, Biden has said little about Yemen. But during the campaign, he referred to Saudi Arabia as a “pariah state,” and announced: “I would end U.S. support for the disastrous Saudi-led war in Yemen and order a reassessment of our relationship with Saudi Arabia.” He also promised to “end the sale of material...to the Saudis where they’re going in and murdering children.” Even back in 2019, Biden said it was “past time to end U.S. support for the war in Yemen.” So the president-elect has a track record of pronouncements against the war. Now we shall see if congress again finds the spine to pass a bill ending U.S. support. If it does, it’s hard to imagine Biden wouldn’t sign it. Even if congress doesn’t, the president on his own can stop much of this butchery.

According to the *Independent* on December 17, however, there’s “no end in sight” for the Yemen war. “The Houthis hold areas in the north and center” of the country, the publication explained. “The government, supported by the coalition, has as its sphere of influence Aden as well as the south and east.” That coalition is led by the Saudis and the United Arab Emirates. In the past, troops and fighter jets from Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco and Sudan, along with support from U.S. mercenaries from the entity once called Blackwater have participated in the assault. Aside from their ally Iran, the Houthis are fairly isolated. According to Human Rights Watch, which appears, for once, to be on the right side of an issue, “Defense Department officials have misled congress about their ability to track and analyze coalition strikes in Yemen...support of Saudi Arabia...remains a top state department priority.” On this issue, as on aggression toward China, the pentagon and the Trump regime see eye to eye: both are fine with more killing in Yemen.

The Trump regime picked a side in a civil war that the U.S. arguably has nothing to do with. Anything for its rich friends the Saudis, despite any atrocities, any savageries. But back in

November, The Arab Weekly contradicted other media assessments and reported that the Saudis wanted to expedite the Yemeni settlement process. Its focus is on a “joint declaration” between the Yemen government it recognizes and the Houthis. “The Arab coalition wants to achieve a breakthrough in the Yemen war file before the end of this year,” the weekly reported. If this is true, the coalition sure has a strange way of showing its peaceful intentions. Things are worse in Yemen than ever.

So prospects for peace right now are not especially bright. The best hope for starving, brutalized Yemen lies in a new Biden administration, which should scrupulously honor its promise to stop promoting genocidal war crimes and thus bust up the Obama-Trump legacy of blood in Yemen. Without U.S. military backing, with actual U.S. condemnation of Saudi Arabia, the war would end quickly. And for once, all too infrequently in its foreign policy, the U.S. would step over to the correct side of history. Trump and Obama chose barbarism over civilization in Yemen. One of Biden’s first acts should be to reverse that.

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