

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY KATHY KELLY

08.09.2023

Prioritizing Human Rights in Relations with Saudi Arabia



The Bombing of a Neighborhood in Yemen, December 28, 2017. Photo: Aida Fallace.

The Saudis picked us up from the detention center in Daer and put us in a minibus going back to the Yemen border. When they released us, they created a kind of chaos; they screamed at us to “get out of the car and get away.” ... this is when they started to fire mortars – to keep us into the mountain line, they fired the mortar from left and right. When we were one kilometer away, ... We were resting together after running a lot...and that’s when they fired mortars on our group. Directly at us. There were 20 in our group and only ten survived. Some of the mortars hit the rocks and then the [fragments of the] rock hit us... They fired on us like rain.

– Munira, 20 years old

There's a refugee trail from the Sahel drought region in Africa, into war-ravaged Yemen, and up through Saudi Arabia towards Iraq and Turkey. It's known as "the Eastern route," or sometimes "the Yemeni route." The Saudi monarchy, already leading an eight-year starvation and bombardment campaign against Iran-aligned, rebel-governed Yemen, has been massacring Ethiopian (and other African) refugees, allegedly in the thousands, to send a message that drought-stricken Africans should choose to die at home and not risk their lives to die in Yemen. It's a chilling, cruel message.

U.S. imperial policies in the region, which have propped up the brutal Saudi monarchy, ensure continued bloodshed, hunger, division and destabilization. These degenerate policies undermine desperately needed collaboration in the face of ecological collapse. Rather than assist people afflicted by droughts, impoverishment and intensifying wars, the United States is acting in its own perceived self-interests and entertaining Saudi demands for even more military power. The purpose of wooing Saudi Arabia with military contracts is, apparently, to head off a further economic integration of Saudi Arabia with China and Russia, global rivals of the United States.

Sometime during the week of September 3, two U.S. State department representatives will arrive in Saudi Arabia's capital city, Riyadh, to resume negotiations with the Saudi royals. A recent report suggests that the meetings will discuss a NATO-like agreement between Saudi Arabia and the United States, a measure which might then move Saudi Arabia closer toward normalizing relations with Israel. What does Riyadh seek in return? "Riyadh has been seeking a NATO-like mutual security treaty that would obligate the US to come to Saudi Arabia's defense if the latter is attacked," according to *The Times of Israel*. The Saudis also seek to strengthen a US-backed civilian nuclear program in Saudi Arabia and they want assurance about acquiring more advanced weaponry from U.S. military contractors.

At the recent summit of the BRICS+ coalition led by U.S. rival, China, Saudi Arabia was announced as a new member to join in January 2024. Earlier this year China had brokered a resumption of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and its (and the U.S.'s) chief regional rival, Iran, which has also been invited to join BRICS+ early next year. The U.S. State Department's Brett McGurk and Barbara Leaf, in their Riyadh trip, will be working to counter integration of the oil-rich Saudi nation into a coalition of nations the U.S. fears as threats to U.S. unipolar hegemony. Routinely, the United States condemns China and Russia for human rights abuses, – abuses paling beside the worst of Saudi Arabia's.

Since 2015, Saudi Arabia has bombed, starved, blockaded and tortured Yemeni civilians. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia continues to persecute and execute its own civilians for speaking out about cruel wrongdoings.

Human Rights Watch, in their 73-page report, “‘They Fired on Us Like Rain’: Saudi Arabian Mass Killings of Ethiopian Migrants at the Yemen-Saudi Border,” alleges that Saudi Arabian border guards have fired machine guns and launched mortars at Ethiopians trying to cross into the kingdom from Yemen, likely killing hundreds of the unarmed migrants in recent years. This widespread and systematic pattern of attacks featured incidents, the report states, when “Saudi border guards asked migrants what limb to shoot, and then shot them at close range. Saudi border guards also fired explosive weapons at migrants who were attempting to flee back to Yemen.” The rights group cited eyewitness reports of attacks by troops and images that showed dead bodies and burial sites on migrant routes, saying the death toll could amount to “possibly thousands”.

Also of interest to the two U.S. envoys should be a report from the *Guardian* which says the U.S. and German militaries have trained and equipped Saudi border guards.

There is a reason for the massive migrant flight from the Sahel into the killing zone that Saudi Arabia, with its international partners, has made of Yemen: The planet is boiling.

Collaboration is surely needed among all peoples in order to cope with and solve the tragic problems, including horrific human rights abuses, certain to escalate because of intensifying climate catastrophes. But military agreements with Saudi Arabia will increase the readiness of Saudi Arabia to attack weaker countries and persecute its own citizenry. Green lighting development of nuclear technology will exacerbate the environmental assaults caused by war. The United States’ policy of confrontation to beat down economic rivals can only worsen these crises.

During years when the United States collaborated with and armed dictators, militaries and paramilitaries in Central and South America, several notable leaders demanded an end to the violence. El Salvador’s Archbishop Oscar Romero, now canonized as a saint, spoke up:

“I would like to appeal in a special way to the men of the army, and in particular to the troops of the National Guard, the police, and the garrisons. Brothers, you belong to our own people. You kill your own brother peasants; and in the face of an order to kill that is given by a man, the law of God that says ‘Do not kill!’ should prevail.

“No soldier is obliged to obey an order counter to the law of God. No one has to comply with an immoral law. It is the time now that you recover your conscience and obey its

dictates rather than the command of sin. . . . Therefore, in the name of God, and in the name of this long-suffering people, whose laments rise to heaven every day more tumultuous, I beseech you, I beg you, I command you! In the name of God: ‘Cease the repression!’”

In a sense, he signed his own death warrant when he signed this statement. On March 24, 1980, Romero was assassinated for his courageous words and deeds.

President Joe Biden would do well to heed this Catholic saint, revise the mandate he gives to diplomats working in Saudi Arabia, and rely on Archbishop Romero’s words: Recover your conscience! Stop the repression, stop the killing.

Rather than normalize militarism and human rights abuses, the United States should seek, always and everywhere, to salvage the planet and respect human rights.

This article first appeared in The Progressive <https://progressive.org/latest/prioritizing-human-rights-kelly-09052023/>

*Kathy Kelly (kathy@worldbeyondwar.org), Board President of World BEYOND War, coordinates the November 2023 [Merchants of Death War Crimes Tribunal](#). She is the author of *Other Lands Have Dreams*, published by CounterPunch/AK Press.*

CounterPunch 07.09.2023