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US-backed Saudi air strikes massacre dozens of Yemeni children for second time in two weeks

At least 22 children and four women were killed by Saudi air strikes in Yemen on Thursday as the US-backed coalition continues its onslaught on the port city of Hodeidah and surrounding areas. The latest atrocities came just two weeks after a Saudi aircraft dropped an American-supplied bomb on a school bus in the northern town of Dahyan, killing 40 children and injuring more than 50.

According to reports from a news network aligned with the Houthi rebels, the first Saudi air strike hit a camp for internally displaced people (IDPS) in Duraihami, killing five people and injuring two. Then, in an act of cold-blooded murder that has become the hallmark of the Saudi air war in the impoverished country, an aircraft struck a group of 26 women and children trying to flee the scene of the earlier air strike by bus.

The Saudi-led coalition sought to justify the bombing by claiming that the rebels fired a ballistic missile from the area earlier in the day. In reality, the indiscriminate targeting of civilians is nothing new. According to data compiled by al-Jazeera and the Yemen Data Project, around one third of the 16,000 Saudi air strikes on Yemen since March 2015 have hit civilian targets. These have included weddings, water treatment plants, hospitals and electricity plants.

As with every air strike launched by the Saudis and their allies, which bear responsibility for the vast majority of the tens of thousands of civilian deaths caused by the bloody three-year-long conflict, the two strikes Thursday would not have occurred without the support of the United States. US military personnel operate a joint headquarters with their Saudi

counterparts in Riyadh for intelligence sharing, regularly refuel Saudi jets in midair so they can continue their murderous raids, and supply the reactionary dictatorship with billions of dollars worth of bombs and other military equipment. Analyses of contracts between US defence contractors and Riyadh indicate that \$90 billion in military equipment was sold to Riyadh by the US between 2010 and 2015.

Just one week prior to the latest massacre, research published by CNN revealed that the 500-pound bomb dropped by Saudi aircraft on a school bus on 9 August was manufactured by Lockheed Martin, the US' largest defence contractor. It was supplied to the Saudi air force in a munitions deal approved by the State Department after former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson lifted restrictions on supplying precision-guided arms shipments to Riyadh in march 2017.

Washington's support for Riyadh's near-genocidal assault on the Yemeni population was initiated by the Obama administration in March 2015. It has been intensified over the past year, including with the deployment of US special forces on the ground to call in air strikes, and a dramatic increase in the number of air strikes launched directly by the US in Yemen. These attacks, ostensibly directed against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and ISIS forces, saw a five-fold increase to over 130 in 2017.

Responding to the latest attack, United Nations officials renewed the organization's demand, issued following the August 9 school bus bombing, for an independent inquiry into the latest round of atrocities. Mark Lowcock, the UN's top relief official, declared that there was no doubt of Riyadh's responsibility for Thursday's twin attacks.

The bombing is part of the Saudi-led coalition's brutal offensive, relaunched in early July in close collaboration with Washington, to take the port city of Hodeidah, which Houthi rebels have held since 2014. The port remains one of the few lifelines through which aid can pass into the war-ravaged country. The siege of the city is causing aid organisations to fear that 8 million Yemenis, more than a third of the population, could be left without food.

Horrendous war crimes like those carried out on Thursday and in the school bus attack are a regular occurrence. On 2 August, at least 60 people were killed and over 130 injured after a fish market in Hodeidah was bombed. Meanwhile, Middle East Eye reported on 16 August that residents of the town of Duraihami, some 20 kilometres south of Hodeidah, had been stranded in their houses for days as Saudi forces and mercenaries carried out an offensive against the city to retake it from the Houthis.

“There are some people that have bled to death [in the street] and no one dared to help them because of the clashes. Some corpses have decayed in the streets,” Ahmed Mubarak, a Duraihami resident, told Middle East Eye. “The town lives under siege, and also we are under siege inside our houses, as the snipers in the city from both sides kill anyone who leaves his house to the street.”

On Friday, Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a 90-page report accusing the Saudi-United Arab Emirates alliance of war crimes. HRW criticised the Joint Incident Assessment Team (JIAT), set up by Saudi Arabia and the UAE to examine allegations of war crimes, for “absolving coalition members of legal responsibility in the vast majority of attacks.” The report continued: “JIAT investigations show no apparent effort to investigate personal criminal responsibility for unlawful air attacks. This apparent attempt to shield parties to the conflict and individual military personnel from criminal liability is itself a violation of the laws of war.”

Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, said, “For more than two years, the coalition has claimed that JIAT was credibly investigating allegedly unlawful air strikes, but the investigators were doing little more than covering up war crimes.”

The slaughtering of civilians in Yemen has been all but ignored by the corporate-controlled media. The few expressions of concern that have been made, including from a handful of members of the US Congress, have focused on the danger that US military personnel could be charged with war crimes, rather than expressing any real concern for the plight of the Yemeni people.

The massacring of tens of thousands of civilians in pursuit of US imperialism's predatory interests in the Middle East long ago became a routine affair for the media and political establishment. If the Saudis now feel they can act with such impunity in Yemen, it is not merely because Washington backs Riyadh's aggressive war to the hilt, but also because the United States has been no less ruthless in its slaughtering of civilians. Since the launching of the “war on terror” 17 years ago, US imperialism has laid waste to entire societies and bears responsibility for deaths in the millions, including in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria.

US imperialism's unwavering support for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen is bound up with its determination to retain its unchallenged dominance over the strategically significant and oil-rich Middle East. Washington's drive to crush the resistance of the Houthis, whom the US and Riyadh routinely accuse, without providing any evidence, of being Iranian

puppets, is viewed as the prelude to an even bloodier and more devastating conflict with Iran.

The threat of such a catastrophic war is growing. In tandem with its backing for the escalation of the Yemen conflict over recent months, the Trump administration has moved to abrogate the 2015 nuclear accord with Iran. At the same time, Washington has given Israel a free hand to bomb Iranian installations in Syria, which has emboldened the right-wing Netanyahu government.

Earlier this month, the US began to reimpose punishing sanctions against Tehran, with a further round due to target Iran's lucrative oil exports in November. Washington has used these measures of economic warfare to bully its nominal allies and rivals alike to line up behind its provocative threats against Iran, which could rapidly erupt into a region-wide military conflict that would draw in the major powers.