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Bloody siege of Yemeni port resumes as US certifies Saudi concern for civilians

US-backed forces led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates renewed their assault on Yemen's Red Sea port of Hodeidah on Wednesday, carrying out as many as 60 airstrikes on the densely populated city.

Saudi-backed mercenary ground forces have reportedly cut off the main road linking Hodeidah with the Yemeni capital of Sana'a, threatening to cut off food and medical imports upon which at least 22 million people, three-quarters of the population, depend. An estimated eight million Yemenis—a number equivalent to the entire population of Switzerland—are already confronting famine.

Aid groups have warned that the renewed assault on Hodeidah threatens to not only kill tens of thousands of civilians, but to push millions more over the brink of starvation.

The ferocious new Saudi-UAE assault came on the same day that US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued a criminally cynical statement certifying that the two US-allied Gulf oil monarchies “are undertaking demonstrable actions to reduce the risk of harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure resulting from military operations.”

The “certification” was required under the terms of a toothless amendment to the \$717 billion 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) signed into law by President Donald Trump last month. Inspired in part by the international outcry over the initial launching of the Saudi-led siege of Hodeidah in June, the measure required the secretary of state to report to Congress within 30 days that Saudi Arabia and the UAE were seeking

to end the more than three-year-old war, ameliorate what is universally recognized as the world's worst humanitarian crisis and reduce the slaughter of civilians.

The ostensible penalty for a failure to provide such assurances would be the cut-off of funding for US tanker jets providing the mid-air refueling that makes it possible for Saudi and UAE warplanes to carry out the continuous aerial bombardment of Yemen. These airstrikes are responsible for the vast majority of the well-over 10,000 deaths of civilians since 2015, when Saudi Arabia initiated the war to stop Houthi rebels from establishing their control over the entire country and to reinstall the US-Saudi puppet government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who currently resides in Riyadh.

The pretense of Congressional Democrats that such a requirement would do anything to halt the mass murder being carried out in Yemen was quickly dispensed with by the Trump administration on Wednesday. Pompeo accompanied his certification with a report obtained by the AFP news agency in which he acknowledged that the US "recognizes that civilian casualties have occurred at rates that are far too high in the Saudi-led coalition's campaign in Yemen."

Pompeo's certification was immediately echoed by US Defense Secretary Gen. James Mattis, who assured the American public that "the governments of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates are making every effort to reduce the risk of civilian casualties and collateral damage to civilian infrastructure resulting from their military operations to end the civil war in Yemen."

The seal of approval for US-backed Saudi and UAE military operations follow a series of recent atrocities, including an August 9 airstrike in which a Saudi warplane dropped a 500-pound bomb on a bus full of children returning from a summer camp, killing 40 children and 11 others. This was followed by another murderous attack on refugees fleeing Hodeidah in which a Saudi missile killed 22 children and four women.

Even before these attacks, a United Nations human rights committee issued a report late last month that detailed Saudi airstrikes against residential areas, marketplaces, funerals and weddings claiming thousands of victims. It made it clear that all those involved, including the Pentagon, are guilty of war crimes.

While making a phony pretense of threatening the aerial refueling operation, the Congressional measure in no way called into question other elements of the massive support Washington provides for the near-genocidal war against the impoverished Yemeni people. This includes the hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of US arms deals with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, intelligence-sharing and targeting assistance, the backing of

the US Navy for the crippling blockade of Yemen and the deployment of US special operations troops on the ground in support of the Saudi offensive.

Aid groups denounced Pompeo's statement. "With Secretary Pompeo's certification, the State Department demonstrated that it is blindly supporting military operations in Yemen without any allegiance to facts, moral code or humanitarian law," Oxfam America said in a statement.

These "facts" were being made on the ground in Yemen even as Pompeo and Mattis issued their hypocritical statements in Washington.

"Multiple sources have reported that dozens, if not scores, of people have been killed in the past 24 hours after Saudi-UAE-led coalition attacks," *Al Jazeera's* correspondent reported. Other reports indicated that Saudi and UAE warplanes and helicopter gunships are bombing and strafing vehicles carrying civilians attempting to escape the besieged city.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have justified their renewed onslaught against Hodeidah based upon the failure of the UN to revive peace talks last Thursday in Geneva.

Anwar Gargash, the UAE's minister of state for foreign affairs, tweeted on Wednesday that the failure of the Houthi rebels to send a delegation to Geneva was "further proof that the liberation of Hodeida is what is needed to bring them to their senses & constructively engage in the political process."

In reality, the Houthis failed to appear in Geneva because the Saudis and the UAE blocked their exit from the country, refused to guarantee their ability to return and rejected a demand for an evacuation of wounded from the capital of Sana'a.

What is now unfolding, with the "humanitarian" seal of approval of Pompeo and Mattis, is a catastrophic escalation of a war whose victims will number in the millions.

Driving this slaughter is US imperialism's determination to assert its hegemony over the entire Middle East and roll back the influence of both Iran and Russia, the same objective that is fueling the dangerous escalation toward a major war in Syria. The continued existence of a regime in Yemen that is not under the thumb of both Riyadh and Washington is seen as an intolerable challenge to this strategy.