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The U.S. and the War on Yemen

By Daniel Larison

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Matthieu Aikins, the *Rolling Stone* reporter recently in Yemen, was interviewed ^[1] on Democracy Now! yesterday along with Farea al-Muslimi. This is what he said about how Yemenis view U.S. responsibility for the war:

Sure. We found cluster bombs, for example, that are banned under the global treaty, that were used by the Saudis in Yemen, that had been—that originally come from the U.S. There's no doubt that Yemenis understand that the weapons and the jets that are being used against them were sold to the Saudis by the U.S., that the U.S. is supporting this war with in-flight refueling, with intelligence and targeting. So, absolutely, Yemenis see the U.S. as being responsible. Often when we visit the site of these civilian casualties where women and children have been killed, **a lot of the ire that people have on the ground was directed toward the United States** [bold mine-DL].

As I said earlier this week ^[2], the U.S. certainly does bear a substantial share of the blame for the effects of this war. It is natural that the people suffering from the bombing campaign and the blockade would hold Saudi Arabia's patron and supporter responsible for what is being done to them. The U.S. has facilitated and endorsed this war, which has already caused extraordinary harm to the civilian population in just three and a half months and will cause much more if it isn't halted very soon. Despite this, the U.S. role is scarcely acknowledged and criticized

infrequently, and so it is no surprise that most of the public is barely aware of it. The U.S. is actively helping to pummel and starve an entire nation, but I suspect that most Americans wouldn't understand at the moment why their government would be blamed by Yemenis for what is happening.

Interventionists in the U.S. like to talk about the value of U.S. "leadership," the importance of strongly supporting so-called "allies," and the dangers of "inaction" (i.e., not attacking other countries or picking sides in their wars), but they become mute when mindless U.S. backing for its clients greatly exacerbates a foreign conflict and puts an entire country on the verge of famine. They either have no problem with U.S. policy, or they see no use in drawing attention to Washington's disgraceful support for the Saudi campaign. Many of the same people that loudly criticize the U.S. for "failing" to stop the brutality of other governments have nothing to say when our own aids a coalition of brutal authoritarian states in smashing a neighboring country.

There is a remarkable lack of debate in the U.S. about this more than three months since it started. Elected Democrats seem to be keeping quiet about the U.S. role in the war probably because they don't want to criticize Obama, and their Republican counterparts that normally look for any reason to attack his foreign policy are mostly silent. The war seems to be widely (and wrongly) perceived as a fight against Iranian influence, and for that reason relatively few people in Washington see anything wrong with it. This would seem to be an issue tailor-made for some of Clinton's challengers, but so far they haven't touched it. As far as I know, the only one on the Republican side that has said something specifically about this war as a candidate was Rubio, and he's all for it.

What makes all of this even more abhorrent is that it has all been done ostensibly to reinstate a ruler who will never be accepted back in Yemen. *The Guardian* also talked ^[3] to Farea al-Muslimi, and this is what he said about the chances of Hadi's return to power:

It is increasingly apparent that Hadi, sheltered by the Saudis, is unlikely to ever return as Yemen's president, and a political solution to the war is unlikely to be reached unless Riyadh alters its goal of reinstating him, largely given that all the Houthis need to do to "win" the conflict is to survive.

"The possibility of the Shah returning from the grave to Iran are bigger than Hadi going back to Yemen," said Muslimi [bold mine-DL], adding that until the Saudis accepted that reality, they would continue to "bomb the forest to kill the snake, even if the forest has 25 million Yemenis."

So the U.S. has participated in this appalling war for nothing, and it has earned the lasting resentment of millions of Yemenis all so that it could "reassure" a reckless authoritarian client government.