



Trump Administration Commits Another War Crime in Yemen

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Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spent his final days in office committing political terrorism, planting foreign policy landmines to hinder incoming President Joe Biden. One of his cruelest actions was to charge the Yemeni Houthis with being a terrorist organization.

He cited missile attacks on civilian targets in Saudi Arabia. That is a war crime, not terrorism. Remember American and British terror bombing of Germany and Japan?

Moreover, Pompeo failed to mention almost six years of Saudi and Emirati bombing of civilian targets in Yemen. Using U.S.-provided warplanes serviced by American personnel, refueled by U.S. tanker aircraft, directed by American intelligence, and armed with U.S.-supplied munitions. The consequences have been catastrophic. According to the UN's Comprehensive Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen: "After six unremitting years of armed conflict in Yemen, the multi-party war continues with no end in sight for the suffering of millions caught in its grip. ... Yemen remains a tortured land, with its people ravaged in ways that should shock the conscience of humanity." Total deaths approach a quarter of a million; 4.3 million people have been displaced.

So who are the real terrorists in the Yemeni civil war? Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump, Secretaries of State John Kerry and Mike Pompeo, and many other US officials complicit in multiple war crimes. So suggested Pompeo's own State Department.

Reported the *New York Times*: "The civilian death toll from Saudi Arabia's disastrous air war over Yemen was steadily rising in 2016 when the State Department's legal office in the Obama administration reached a startling conclusion: Top American officials could be charged with war crimes for approving bomb sales to the Saudis and their partners. Four years later, more than a dozen current and former US officials say the legal risks have only grown as President Trump has made selling weapons in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other Middle East nations a cornerstone of his foreign policy."

The UN offered evidence to back this judgment. Concluded Group of Experts: "the parties to the conflict continue to show no regard for international law or the lives, dignity, and rights of

people in Yemen, while third states have helped to perpetuate the conflict by continuing to supply the parties with weapons." The most important third state is not Iran. *It is the US*

Yemen's Houthis, who have been at war against the internationally-recognized government for years, are blameworthy, responsible for frequent indiscriminate artillery and mortar attacks. Alas, Washington and other Western states have ensured that the Saudi and Emirati "coalition" is better armed and thus capable of doing much greater harm.

The World Peace Foundation's Alex de Waal explained: "The fact that the Houthis have stolen, taxed, and diverted food for their own political ends, and, on at least one occasion, also used starvation tactically to military ends (in the siege of Ta'izz) does not detract from the criminality of the Saudi and Emirati campaign. Yemen was already a poor and food insecure country, with a long-standing water scarcity. This would have been well-known to those who planned and administered the starvation of Yemen. If they knew that Yemenis were vulnerable to starvation, was it not particularly reprehensible for them to fight a war of starvation in that country?"

Saudi and Emirati air attacks are most noteworthy for hitting civilian targets, including apartments, markets, weddings, funerals, and even school buses. Concluded the experts' panel: "Individuals in the coalition, in particular Saudi Arabia, may have conducted airstrikes in violation of the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution."

America's allies also have been responsible for more mundane brutality. The UN pointed to "human rights violations including arbitrary deprivation of life, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, gender-based violence, including sexual violence, torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, the recruitment and use in hostilities of children, the denial of fair trial rights, violations of fundamental freedoms, and economic, social and cultural rights."

However, the Saudi/Emirati blockade has been particularly damaging. The experts' group warned: "the continuous deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Yemen is directly attributable to the conduct of the parties to the conflict. In its previous reports, the Group of Experts has documented the disproportionate effects on the civilian population of the de facto blockade and access restrictions, including the closure of Sana'a airport, imposed by the coalition and Government of Yemen."

The result has been widespread malnutrition, even starvation, and disease, especially cholera. Civilian infrastructure has been ravaged, restricting access to food, clean water, and health care. Three UN agencies warned that more than half of the population face "worsening levels of hunger." UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres went further: "Yemen is in imminent danger of the worst famine in decades. Without immediate action, millions of lives may be lost."

Thus, the US supported war has left an incredible 80 percent of the population, about 24 million people, in need of outside aid. However, Pompeo's designation of the Houthis as terrorists – a parting gift to Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who launched the aggressive war against Yemen – will make it harder for humanitarian organizations to operate in the country. Explained the new chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Rep. Gregory

Meeks (D-NY), the designation "makes it harder to deliver life-saving assistance in a country already experiencing the worst humanitarian crisis in the world."

That is, in the short-term Pompeo is knowingly compounding war crimes already committed by the administration in backing the Saudis and Emiratis. Thousands of civilians could die needlessly as a result of the Trump administration's parting cruelty. Mark Lowcock, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, said the designation "risks undermining imports of food and become the final straw that tips the country into now just a small famine, but a large one." Ian Ralby, with the consulting firm I.R. Consilium, warned "If we do not want to cause Yemen to lose an entire generation, we need to back off this designation." Oxfam's Scott Paul tweeted that Pompeo's action is "Reckless homicide on a staggering scale."

In the longer-term, the step also makes ending the war more difficult. Even the Saudis, who have blundered through years of incompetent war-making, admit that a political solution is necessary. That requires accepting a role for the Houthis. As Ambassador Ryan Crocker, who served in the Mideast noted, "The Houthis are an integral part of Yemeni society This is making a strategic enemy out of a local force that has been part of Yemen for generations."

Treating them, Yemenis all, as terrorists could intensify the conflict. Warned Peter Salisbury of the International Crisis Group: "we might see trade and financial flows dry up across Yemen, the diplomatic process blown up and the Houthis deciding hey need to repay the favor by increasing the tempo of attacks into Saudi Arabia while turning to Iran for more support." That is, Pompeo's action almost certainly makes any peace agreement more difficult to forge – which means more death and destruction in Yemen, and instability and conflict in the Middle East.

Blame for backing Saudi/Emirati aggression is shared by the Obama and Trump administrations. At least many members of the former administration admit they made a mistake, providing a blank check for murderous aggression. President-elect Joe Biden promised to hold Riyadh accountable for crimes ignored, even blessed, by the Trump administration. The new president should make halting Washington's support for war crimes a priority. Reversing Pompeo's dishonest and cruel terrorism designation would be a good starting point.

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