



Yemen: No to Saudi intervention!

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On 25 March, Saudi Arabia and its allies began a series of air strikes in Yemen, aimed against the Houthis and their allies, who include sections of the Yemeni Army loyal to the former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh. According to the Saudis and their allies, the intervention, code named Operation Decisive Storm, would target rebel military forces only. Like all such 'surgical' interventions, however, it is the civilian population in the targeted cities who suffer. Over 200 have been killed already and 100,00 more turned into refugees, all regarded as mere 'collateral damage' by the self-appointed 'liberators'.

The arch-reactionary Saudi monarchy has been joined by an alliance consisting of Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain. Egypt and Sudan have promised troops, although Pakistan has refused to commit ground forces. The United States is providing intelligence and logistical support, including drones and increased supplies of weapons to the coalition states.

Currently, the action has been confined to massive aerial and some naval bombardments, but the intervention could develop into an all-out invasion. That would bring even greater misery, oppression and mass killing to a country that has already been devastated by poverty, military dictatorship, economic decline and reactionary internal wars for more than two decades.

Saudi Arabia has justified its intervention with a pack of lies, slavishly retailed by the Western media. It presents its actions as a 'self-defence' against a Shia conspiracy, backed by Iran, aimed at destabilising Yemen, the Saudi monarchy and its client regimes in the Gulf. The Wahabi Saudi monarchy, which is oppressing its own Shia citizens and has encouraged and financed arch-reactionary Sunni Islamist forces throughout the Arab world, laughably presents its intervention as struggle against 'extremism'.

For that purpose, it has formed an alliance with such 'moderates' as the Libyan and Sudanese governments, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the butcher of the Egyptian revolution, and the Yemeni president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, a Saudi and US puppet. Outside the Arab League, this alliance includes such illustrious 'democrats' as the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Pakistan's Nawaz Sharif who have pledged support for the intervention.

The West

Clearly, the Western imperialist powers, both North American and European, have given their blessing to the Saudi intervention. This is particularly true for the US since it was forced to withdraw forces from its military basis near Aden, which had been a base for drone attacks in the so-called 'war on terror' for targets in Yemen.

Equally clearly, like all the regional, semi-colonial powers in the Middle East, Iran has been trying to increase its political influence in the Arabian peninsula and surrounding states. Teheran hopes to take advantage of the near collapse of the Iraqi and Syrian states and of the decline of US hegemony over the region. Saudi Arabia and other Sunni states have accused the Houthis of being a proxy for Iran, the region's Shi'ite superpower. The Houthis themselves deny this.

For the Iranian regime, the Houthi rebellion represents only a tactical asset in the bigger game to increase its influence

in Iraq in particular. The objective of this is an agreement with the US and the Western European powers which would end the decades long economic blockade and other sanctions. It is unlikely that Teheran ever intended (nor does it really have the means) to intervene militarily or to establish a pro-Iranian regime in Yemen. The aim was probably 'only' to ensure a certain say in the country's affairs.

After the ousting of the dictator Saleh by the Yemeni version of Arab Spring, the new president, Hadi, rapidly failed to meet any of the democratic and social demands of the revolution. Indeed, he tried to concentrate even more of the country's wealth, and the power of the state, into his own hands and those of a small section of the elite.

The Houthis are an Islamist insurgency from northwestern Yemen's Saada province whose origins lie in the Shabab al-Mumanin (the Believing Youth), a group that became active in the early 1990s. They belong to the Zaydi branch of Shia Islam, which had dominated Yemen for centuries but was sidelined after a civil war in the 1960s and repressed by the Yemeni government.

After the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, Hussein al-Houthi, one of the leaders of the Believing Youth, launched anti-American protests and became a fierce critic of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. He was killed in a clash with government forces but the insurgency continued with the movement renamed after him, led by a relative, the 33-year-old Abdulmalik al-Houthi.

Yemeni Spring

In the Arab Spring in 2011, the Houthis took part in the ousting of Saleh and in the the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) after he was forced from power. When Hadi became president, in 2012, after a U.N.-brokered peace deal, the new regime faced not only the Houthis and a growing threat from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, but also the open disloyalty of many of Saleh's military officers.

Hadi soon had to rely almost totally on the Saudis and the Americans. The International Monetary Fund offered Yemen a \$560m loan, conditional on cuts in the food and fuel subsidies that only just keep the impoverished population afloat. In July and August 2014, he imposed sweeping cuts in oil subsidies, which hit the poorest hardest. This produced mass demonstrations and began the unravelling of the 'peace process'.

Emboldened by the crisis, the Houthis renewed their offensive. In September 2014, they entered Saana, the capital and ousted the government. They then kept Hadi under house arrest for weeks until eventually he fled the capital and, after a brief attempt to rally forces in the south, fled to Saudi.

Whilst Yemen has certainly long been riven with huge social conflicts, inter-sectarian conflict was rare until the civil war, thanks to its outside backers, increasingly took the form of a reactionary sectarian struggle. The Houthi, despite participating in the the ousting of Saleh, were excluded from any power-sharing by Hadi. They then formed an alliance with sections of the army and high command loyal to the former dictator, Saleh. Saleh probably wants to use this alliance to install his own son in office.

The war waged by the the Houthi 'rebels' and Saleh, whilst targeted against a reactionary presidency, did not represent a progressive cause, or a continuation of the Yemeni Spring. Any restoration of Saleh, or his son, in alliance with the Houthi leadership would be yet another version of the counterrevolution that has crushed the democratic hopes of 2012, something from which the working class, the youth and peasantry have nothing to gain.

Saudi Arabia has used Hadi's overthrow and flight as a pretext to justify a military intervention. It prefers a puppet regime to any coalition that would have to balance between, and make concessions to, the other forces in Yemeni society

Saudi has managed to get the Arab League to agree to a 40,000 strong rapid deployment force under Saudi command to intervene against 'extremism'. This is part of the Saudi objective to assert itself as a leading force in the region, something Egypt, Turkey and Iran are also all trying to do.

The western imperialist powers have clearly given official backing for the intervention. The US itself has a long record of military action in Yemen and has military bases in the country. However, it is unlikely that it was the US that took the initiative for the intervention but rather that it found it necessary to back the Saudi regime, with whom relations have been strained recently because of the attempted deal with Iran over its nuclear programme.

Disorder

This reflects a key feature of the current period and of the general political situation in the Middle East. The collapse of the 'old order' in the region, the weakening of US hegemony, the rise of imperialist rivalries and the 'disorder' following the Arab revolutions, encouraged the stronger semi-colonial powers to try to take advantage of the current instability.

The Obama administration (in contrast to the hawks of the Republican Party and the pro-Israel lobby) and, even more, the European imperialist powers, are seeking a realignment with Iran. They hope this will stabilise Iraq and, in the process, contain Iranian influence. Moreover, they need to prevent Iran being driven further into an alliance with China and Russia. On the other hand, this is clearly a scenario that threatens Saudi (and Israeli) interests.

Obviously, this does not alter the arch-reactionary character of the Saudi-led intervention. However, it clearly points to a situation in which reactionary internal wars and all other 'internal' conflicts can easily encourage foreign intervention. This carries the danger that they become proxy wars between regional powers and/or different imperialisms, with the real possibility of going beyond the region.

Revolutionaries, workers and youth world-wide should condemn the intervention of Saudi Arabia, its allies and its open support by the US and other Western imperialisms. Whilst they should continue to oppose a seizure of power by Houthi and Saleh-loyal forces, the Yemeni working class, peasants and youth need to defend themselves against the air-strikes from Saudi Arabia and its allies, let alone a full scale invasion. In such resistance, a military bloc with the Houthis would be justified.

The only consistently progressive outcome would be the revival of the social and democratic demands and forces of the Yemeni Spring, including the call for a non-sectarian, secular, constituent assembly. This would have to address the issue of the terrible poverty of the country and the social needs of the urban and rural poor, the women and the youth.

In all the countries backing the Saudi intervention, we demand an end to all support for the Hadi regime and the bombing campaign. We fight for the withdrawal from the region of all imperialist troops, ships, aircraft and the closure of all their military and naval bases.

Mobilisation

In order to bring this about, a mass movement of working class, youth, the peasants and the poor is needed, in particular in all the countries supporting the intervention. It is clear that the Saudi monarchy or the US imperialists, or any other backer of the intervention, cannot be stopped by lame peace resolutions in the UN.

They can only be stopped by mass mobilisations and struggles that force them to withdraw their troops or cease backing a reactionary intervention. Such a movement must be built in the workplaces, the universities, the popular districts, in town and countryside, calling on all working class and democratic forces to support it.

Whilst mobilisations against the military intervention in Yemen will be the immediate issue, an alliance against the interventions by all the imperialist powers in the region and against the reactionary regimes, needs to be built. This must be a movement independent of all these imperialist and bourgeois forces and its goal must be to rebuild and regroup the forces of the Arab Spring who now face a counter-revolutionary offensive in almost every country.

In Yemen, in particular, this means that opposition to the Saudi intervention needs to be combined with strict political independence from both the warring factions of the civil war and their leaderships. Indeed, the lack of any form of

independent working class organisation was the decisive reason why the Yemeni revolution in 2011/12 failed to achieve its objectives. If the democratic and social aspirations of the masses who forced Saleh to resign are to be achieved, then self-defence organisations and councils of action of the urban and rural masses have to be built, coordinated, centralised.

Even more important, the small Yemeni working class needs an organisation, a political party, which is able to present a revolutionary, socialist solution to the democratic and economic issues which have given the country mass poverty, mass unemployed (about a quarter of the youth), hyper inflation, rising prices, water shortages, mass oppression of women and minorities and civil war. Without a revolutionary party, the working class will never be able to fight for its own class goals nor to rally the peasantry and the urban poor in a struggle against imperialist plunder and capitalist exploitation.

However, unlike all the other social forces, a revolutionary working class party would not see the struggle for a workers' and peasants' government in Yemen in isolation, but as an integral part of the revolution in the whole Middle East, as part of the struggle for a Socialist Federation; the only programme that can fulfil the aspirations of the Arab Spring and smash the current wave of reaction in the region.

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