

On the Ongoing Assault on Hudaydah, Yemen

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Mass Proletariat condemns the assault on the Yemeni port of Hudaydah by the Saudi and UAE coalition, the latest act of imperialist aggression in the country's seven-year-old civil-war. This coalition—while nominally representing the Yemeni government-in-exile of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi—is backed, both politically and militarily, by France, the U.K., and the U.S. The coalition is attempting to rest control of Hudaydah from the Houthi-led, Iran-backed Supreme Political Council. The Houthis, currently in control of large sections of the country, are a Yemeni Shi'a political party with a corresponding military wing. The assault takes place within an ongoing civil war in Yemen. While the Houthis do not fundamentally represent the interests of the Yemeni people, the coalition's assault on Hudaydah will cut off the flow of basic material aid to the masses of Yemen and exacerbate the ongoing famine, cholera crisis, and abject suffering in the country.

Background

Situated at the southern end of the Arabian peninsula, Yemen occupies a key position, economically and militarily. Its proximity to the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden provides access to key shipping lanes that transport goods from the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal, the Middle East, and Asia. Approximately ten percent of the world's seaborne oil passes through Bab-el-Mandeb, the strait which connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden. While Yemen itself has a relatively small navy, it has a number of treaties and agreements which allow the U.S., NATO, the E.U., and countries such as Japan and India to patrol its waters on anti-piracy and other missions aimed at ensuring the uninterrupted flow of global commerce.

Prior to 1990, Yemen was divided into the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) which were respectively U.S. and Soviet neocolonies. Their unification, which occurred just prior to the collapse of the USSR, was preceded by an agreement to establish a Joint Investment Area along their border to survey for and develop oil resources. This deal was facilitated by the Hunt Oil Company and Exxon, two major U.S. oil corporations, which provided technology and capital for the project and

maintained effective control of its development. The fall of the USSR and the unification of Yemen resulted in the country's thorough domination by Western imperialism, with U.S. allies in the Middle East like Saudi Arabia and the UAE also playing a significant role in Yemen's domestic economy and politics.

Even prior to Unification, North Yemen signed numerous treaties and agreements which gave American, French, South Korean, and Japanese companies the rights to much of the oil and natural gas produced in the country. Companies from these imperialist countries often also controlled the majority stake in various government run projects. This process has only accelerated in the wake of unification, with the IMF and World Bank providing the country with a number of loans which were contingent upon its further opening up to foreign capital and greater submission to imperialist domination.

For example, in 1995 the Yemeni government created the Yemen LNG Company (YLNG). The project was financed by \$4 billion in foreign loans from banks in the U.S., France, the U.K., South Korea, and Japan. In addition to foreign control via the loans which financed the development of the project, the French oil company Total purchased a 39.62% stake in YLNG, the American Hunt Oil Corporation a 17.22% stake, the SK Group—a South Korean conglomerate—a 9.55% stake, the South Korean natural gas company Kogas a 6% stake, and the South Korean Hyundai Corporation a 5.88% stake. In contrast, the Yemen Gas Company has only a 16.73% stake in the company.¹

Yemen has also been a key country through which Saudi Arabia and the UAE have expanded their influence in the region. For example, in 1991, Yemen established the Aden Free Zone (AFZ) in the southern port of Aden. In this, and in other “free zones,” akin to special economic zones in other parts of the world, where foreign capital has complete control and ownership. There are no taxes, and there are no restrictions on repatriation of profits and capital. Additionally, the Yemeni government works in close collaboration with foreign capitalists to suppress any and all workers' organizing and movements in these “free zones.” Both Saudi and UAE corporations play a major role in the AFZ. The UAE company Dubai Ports Worlds currently operates the Aden Container Terminal in the AFZ and thus effectively controls the shipping that passes through it. The development of the AFZ has been directed by the Saudi Arabian Bin Mohfoud Group in conjunction with the Port of Singapore Authority.² These are but a few example of the overall imperialist control and domination of Yemen. They clearly show the comprador nature of the Yemeni state and its subservience to foreign capital.

While oil and gas account for approximately 90% of exports from Yemen and amounted to 60-70% of pre-civil war government revenues, the majority of the Yemeni population is engaged in agricultural and pastoral labor in semi-feudal conditions. Yemen is also the poorest country in the Middle East, and has

¹<https://uk.reuters.com/article/lng-yemen-total-idUKL959162220091015>

²<https://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2012/191265.htm>

a significant Arab proletariat. In contrast, many more wealthy Arab nations like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE rely heavily on foreign workers and indentured servants who work in slave-like conditions and are often prevented from leaving the country at will.³ In contrast, the vast majority of Yemenis are Arabs or Afro-Arabs, and as such the ruling class of the country has had to rely on the exploitation of largely Arab people. This has been a major factor which has contributed to unrest in the country.

The fact that Yemen has been gripped by a civil war and major crisis since 2011, is a manifestation of the current crisis of capitalist-imperialism. The once loyal neocolony has not been able to maintain the unity of its rule, and has been gripped by mass protests against the government's domestic repression and subservience to foreign capital. This crisis has also created openings for rival imperialist powers like China and Russia, and junior-imperialist powers like Iran, to make a foothold in the country. Russia's attempts to take over American investments in Yemen, Iran's expanding influence throughout the region—in particular through sponsoring Shi'a movements—and China's gains in the Horn of Africa have threatened Western imperialist dominance in the region, as well as the position of their junior imperialist partners like Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

In this context, the civil war in Yemen should be understood as a competition between rival imperialist powers for control and domination of the country. Yemen's strategic location makes it a key flash-point in the larger inter-imperialist conflict that is developing. As this process continues, rival imperialist powers adopt more and more brutal methods to gain or maintain control of markets, resources, strategic locations, and profits. However, it is also important to remember that it was the heroic resistance and struggle of the Yemeni masses that initially precipitated the crisis in the Yemeni state, and has continued to undermine various imperialist schemes to establish a stable comprador government and hence to consolidate control over the country. Despite the incredible difficulties and brutal oppression that they have faced, the Yemeni masses have continuously rebelled against comprador capitalists and foreign imperialists. We stand in solidarity with their anti-imperialist struggle and condemn the machinations of both Iran and the US-led bloc that aim to crush their resistance and establish a new comprador government in control of the country.

Civil War in Yemen

A civil war has been raging in Yemen since 2011. During the Arab Spring, popular-democratic and anti-imperialist protests broke out against the government, then run by dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh. This comprador government was backed by France, the U.K., and the U.S., as well as Gulf nations like Saudi

³Prior to 1990, approximately one million Yemenis worked in Saudi Arabia. However, they were expelled after the Yemeni government refused to support the coalition against Saddam Hussein in the First Gulf War.

Arabia and the UAE. Saleh had ruled Yemen since 1990, and was the ruler of North Yemen before that. Mass protests opposed his links to U.S. imperialism, the systematic corruption in his government, and his brutal crackdowns against all forms of political opposition.

The protests sharpened long-standing contradictions in the Yemeni state, in particular between factions within the military. Saleh was working to appoint his son as supreme commander of the military, setting him up to eventually take over rule of the country. This upset some within Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC), then the ruling political party, including Major General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar—who was then leader of the First Armored Division and had strong ties in the Yemeni intelligence community—as well as his brother Sheikh Sadiq al-Ahmar. Sadiq stepped down from his position in the GPC in February, 2011 and aligned himself with the Al-Islah party, which attempted to co-opt the mass movement for its own aims. That March, Saleh tried unsuccessfully to assassinate General Moshen. Moshen then stated that he and other military officers would protect protesters from Saleh's ongoing violent reprisals, effectively endorsing the movement to oust Saleh as leader of the government. This competition internal to the Yemeni state, coupled with the mass movement, led to a major crisis, with the GPC and Al-Islah both competing to outmaneuver the other, co-opt the people's movement, and secure their position as the main comprador force in the country.

In the midst of this crisis, on February 21, 2011⁴ Houthi leader Abdul-Malik Badreddin al-Houthi backed the popular protests against the government, and called for regime change.⁵ With military and political aid from Iran, the Houthis have been waging an insurgency in rural northern Yemen since 2004. The crisis that Saleh's government faced provided the Houthis with an opportunity to rapidly expand their territory and influence. Iran used this opening, and the pretext of preventing piracy in the Gulf of Aden, to deploy warships to the region and to provide the Houthis with arms and military advisers. In response, Saudi Arabia began launching air strikes against the Houthis. However, the contradictions between the military forces loyal to Saleh, and those supporting General Moshen, were so great that the Yemeni military did not put up a significant opposition to the Houthis' expansion on the ground.

By November 2011, Saleh was forced to step down as president. The U.S. and the Saudi and UAE-dominated Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) brokered a deal whereby Saleh's vice president, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, would take over as president. This deal included the creation of a coalition government between the GPC and the Al-Islah Party, which had risen in power with the support

⁴February 21, 2011 corresponded to the 17 Rabi' al-awwal (the third month of the Islamic calendar), the day Shi'a scholars believe to be the birthday of the prophet Mohammed. This is indicative of the efforts by Iran and the Houthis to falsely frame this conflict and the underlying social contradictions as a religious conflict between Shi'a and Sunni Islam instead of a proxy war between rival imperialist powers and their allies.

⁵<https://web.archive.org/web/20110225012535/http://www.presstv.ir/detail/166419.html>

of General Mohsen and his brother Sheikh Sadiq. The coalition excluded the Houthis, as the U.S.-aligned bloc saw the Houthis, and their relations with Iran, as a threat to their imperialist interests in Yemen.⁶

The deal also proposed a series of reforms aimed at calming mass unrest, and at reorganizing the military. Both were designed to develop a force more loyal to the interests of foreign capital, and to remove military officers upset by Saleh's ousting. Overall the deal protected existing GCC and Western imperialist interests in Yemen. However, the coalition government struggled to properly implement these changes,⁷ and Hadi's government remained plagued by crises, including mass protests,⁸ the Houthi insurgency which was gaining ground in the countryside of northern Yemen, and a Sunni insurgency supposedly linked with al-Qaeda developing in the south.⁹

In July 2014, as part of promised "reforms," Hadi's government announced that it would cut fuel subsidies. Pressure to eliminate the subsidies had come from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which stipulated these changes as a

⁶The deal also aimed at further consolidating Saudi imperialist domination of Yemen. For example, in the wake of the deal the Saudi Government announced a plan to invest \$20 billion in Aden. <https://www.albawaba.com/business/saudi-arabia-yemen--447415>

⁷This in part seems due to the extreme imperialist hubris and chauvinism of the U.S. armed forces, who, for example, refused to train Yemeni pilots and aircraft maintainers in Arabic, and instead taught the classes, including the actual flight training in the aircraft, exclusively in English. See https://wikileaks.org/yemen-files/document/2013/201305xx_Yemen_Response/

Relatedly, competition between Hadi and General Mohsen led to Hadi dismissing Mohsen as the head of the First Armed Division. This further exacerbated contradictions internal to the military. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/12/19/world/meast/yemen-military>

⁸Many protests opposed the Hadi government's continued lackeyism to U.S. imperialism and the high levels of corruption. In particular, there was significant opposition to Hadi's willingness, under the guise of counter-terrorism, to allow the U.S. military to terrorize the people with repeated drone strikes. Given that the class character of the government had not changed with the GCC-brokered deal, it is not surprising that Hadi's government continued to have a comprador bourgeois character. The continued and courageous resistance of the Yemeni people demonstrates a certain unwillingness to be duped by the machinations of imperialist oppressors.

⁹While it is possible that the forces in Yemen were part of al-Qaeda (and later the Islamic State), any assertion by the U.S. Government that an Islamic group is linked with al-Qaeda should be received with extreme suspicion. In the wake of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, Congress passed the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) which authorizes the use of United States Armed Forces against those responsible for the September 11 attacks and against any "associated forces." Since its inception the AUMF has been used on numerous occasions in countries all over the world to justify U.S. military aggression, including against progressive Islamic groups, and the burden of proof for demonstrating that a group is "associated" with al-Qaeda has generally been extremely low. According to journalist Seymour Hersh, the U.S. currently has ongoing military operations in 76 countries around the world, and many of them are authorized through use of the AUMF.

In Yemen, the AUMF was used in the wake of the Arab Spring to justify a massive increase in U.S. military action in the country, in the form of arming and training the Yemeni military as well as conducting covert operations. For an official Congressional report on the AUMF see <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/pres-aumf.pdf>. Note that this report only covers *publicly available* executive actions, and thus is certainly a gross underestimate of how often the AUMF has been invoked to justify military action.

condition for granting a \$560 million loan to the Yemeni government.¹⁰ At the time, the government was in financial turmoil, and the loan was supposed to provide short-term relief. Cutting the fuel subsidies led to mass protests, which were met with a violent government crackdown. The Houthis were able to draw on the mass outrage against Hadi's government to consolidate support for their rebellion, especially in urban areas where they previously had limited influence.

During this period, ex-president Saleh returned to Yemen, brokered an alliance with the Houthis, and worked to win support for his return to power among the GPC. By September 21, 2014, the Houthis took control of the Yemeni capital of Sana'a. While some members of the Yemeni army fought against the Houthis, Saleh had been successful in winning the support of many officers, and the interior minister ordered the army to stand down as the Houthis took control of the city.¹¹ The internal contradictions in the army were a reflection of the divisions in the coalition government. While some in the coalition government, in particular those aligned with the Al-Islah Party,¹² opposed the Houthi takeover of Sana'a, many others supported it. These contradictions prevented the coalition from mounting a successful and coordinated defense of the city.

The Houthi coup was completed when, on November 8, 2014, the GPC ousted Hadi as its leader, and threw its support behind Saleh.¹³ Hadi officially resigned as president of Yemen in January, 2015. His resignation sparked mass protests against the Houthi coup throughout the country.¹⁴ Hadi subsequently fled to the southern port of Aden and reneged on his resignation, claiming that his hand had been forced by the Houthis. He later fled the country to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and worked to drum up international support for foreign military intervention in Yemen. In February 2015, the Houthis dissolved the Yemeni parliament and replaced it with a "Revolutionary Committee" led by Mohammed Ali al-Houthi. This precipitated a crisis in which various warlords in southern Yemen—largely outside of Houthi control at the time—threatened to secede and form a separate state.¹⁵ The dissolution of the parliament was met with mass protests, which the Houthis suppressed by firing into crowds and arresting protesters.¹⁶

¹⁰<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-yemen-budget-subsidies-idUKKBN0FZ1F020140730>

¹¹<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-29380668>

¹²In particular, General Mohsen used the chaos to rally troops to his banner, and attempted to launch a coup. While troops under his command were some of the few that fought against the Houthis, they were unsuccessful in their coup, and Mohsen then was forced to flee the country.

¹³<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-president/yemens-houthis-reject-new-power-sharing-government-idUSKBN0IS0CZ20141108>

In 2017, discontent with his limited role in the Houthi-run government, Saleh launched a rebellion in Sana'a against the Houthis and called on his supporters to "retake the country." He had reportedly been in dialogue with the Saudis and the UAE. The rebellion in Sana'a was crushed and Saleh was killed by the Houthis while attempting to flee to a Saudi-coalition controlled section of Yemen.

¹⁴<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/24/houthi-yemen-protesters-sanaa-president-hadi-resignation>

¹⁵<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-fragmentation-analysis/yemens-risks-disintegration-as-south-rejects-shiite-groups-takeover-idUSKBN0KY0BR20150125>

¹⁶<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/02/thousands-protest-houthi-coup-yemen->

In response to this crisis and the Houthis' military advances towards the southern port of Aden, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in consultation with various Western imperialist powers, formed a military and political coalition and launched a military campaign in Yemen, named Operation Decisive Storm. While nominally in support of Hadi's government, the coalition's real aim is to protect the interests of various imperialist and expansionist powers. The coalition includes ground and air forces from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, Kuwait, Qatar,¹⁷ and Bahrain.¹⁸ Djibouti, Eritrea, and Somalia all have made their airspace, territorial waters, and military bases available for coalition use. The private American military contractor Academi—formerly Blackwater—has also provided troops to the coalition. Additionally, France, the U.K., and the U.S. all have provided extensive military aid, weapons, bombs, intelligence, and even in-flight-refueling to the coalition. On the other side, Iran, Syria,¹⁹ North Korea,²⁰ Hezbollah,²¹ and Russia²² all provide varying degrees of military and economic support to the Houthis.

Since 2015, the civil war has intensified, famine has spread throughout the country, and at least 17.5 million people are without regular access to clean water and are therefore at high-risk for infection from cholera. In short, the competition between rival imperialist powers and their associated allies for control of Yemen and the nearby shipping lanes through Bab-el-Mandeb has brought untold suffering on the Yemeni people. The country remains deeply divided, with the Houthis, various factions in the coalition, and numerous warlords controlling different sections of the country.

The ongoing coalition assault on Hudaydah is only bringing more suffering upon the Yemeni people and appears to be part of a strategy to literally starve out the Houthis-controlled areas. According to a recent World Bank report, 17.8 million Yemenis—about sixty percent of the population—struggle to find food daily, with at least 8.4 million of them on the brink of famine.²³ Yemen relies

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¹⁷Since the development of the GCC crisis in which Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and others blockaded Qatar, the latter has withdrawn from the coalition. Qatar has since taken a more pro-Houthi stance, attempted to mediate the conflict, and according to some, has supplied arms and other support to the Houthis. See <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2017/06/06/Houthis-join-Iran-come-to-Qatar-s-defense-after-severance-of-ties.html>, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/02/russia-qatar-military-cooperation-s400-missile-defense.html>, and <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/2/15264/How-did-Qatar-back-the-Houthis-in-Yemen>

¹⁸<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/03/saudi-ambassador-announces-military-operation-yemen-150325234138956.html>

¹⁹<https://web.archive.org/web/20170211214712/http://aranews.net/2015/03/syrian-regime-coordinates-military-training-with-yemeni-houthis>

²⁰https://www.huffingtonpost.com/samuel-ramani/north-koreas-balancing-ac_b_7995688.html

²¹<https://www.haaretz.com/hezbollah-iran-helping-yemen-s-hawthi-rebels-1.5307953>

²²<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/02/russia-qatar-military-cooperation-s400-missile-defense.html>

²³<https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-securing-imports-essential-food-commodities-yemen-assessment-constraints-and>

heavily on food imports to feed its population, and Hudaydah is a vital port of entry for food imports to much of the country.

It should come as no surprise that the coalition would commit genocide via bombing, occupation, famine, and a cholera crisis. Imperialist and junior-imperialist powers would rather slaughter millions than let the profits that those people produce—and key strategic resource and shipping lanes in the country—fall under the control of rival imperialist powers. Such is the logic of capitalist-imperialism. This logic has played out in both the Houthi assaults to gain control of various cities and towns, and in the coalition’s brutal military campaign to wrest control of northern Yemen from the Houthis. According to a U.N. estimate, as many as 250,000 may die in the assault on Hudaydah,²⁴ and likely millions more will die if the coalition is successful in cutting off food supplies to the Houthi-controlled sections of the country.

Despite these incredibly difficult circumstances, the Yemeni masses have engaged in mass resistance to the comprador government, the Houthi insurgency, the machinations of various regional warlords, and to foreign imperialist intervention in their country. Mass Proletariat stands in solidarity with the Yemeni people in their struggle for liberation from feudalism, imperialism, and comprador capitalism. Mass Proletariat condemns the various imperialist powers, comprador capitalists, and feudal warlords who aim to profit from the suffering of the Yemeni people.

As the global crisis of capitalist-imperialism deepens, and inter-imperialist competition intensifies, the imperialists will inevitably resort to more warfare, both through proxies and directly with each other. We call upon all progressive and anti-imperialist forces in the U.S. to stand in solidarity with the Yemeni people, and with all the oppressed peoples of the world.

²⁴<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/unsc-hold-emergency-session-assault-yemen-hudaida-180614070602614.html>