

US brands Yemen's Houthi rebels “terrorists,” paving way for mass starvation

Bill Van Auken
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Waving aside warnings by humanitarian organizations that his action threatens mass starvation in Yemen, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced Monday that Washington will designate the Houthi rebels, who govern territory containing 70 percent of the Yemeni population, as a “foreign terrorist organization.”

This cynical and potentially catastrophic measure is being taken by the ostensibly “lame-duck” secretary of state as part of an unrelenting “maximum pressure” campaign of punishing economic sanctions and continuous military provocations against Iran.

Washington has sought to portray the Houthi movement, which has existed and ruled over parts of Yemen for generations, as a puppet of Tehran, something the Houthis have continuously denied. Claims of substantial amounts of Iranian aid for the Houthis in the nearly five-year-old war launched against them by Saudi Arabia have never been proven.

As for “terrorism,” the statement refers vaguely to Houthi “cross-border attacks threatening civilian populations, infrastructure and commercial shipping.” Pompeo also insisted that one “need not look further” than a December 30 attack launched against the airport in the southern port city of Aden that killed 27 people. The attack, which took place as a Saudi puppet “unity government” landed at the airport, was blamed by Riyadh and Washington on the Houthis, who denied they were responsible. Afterwards, Saudi forces ordered the arrest in connection with the attack of a senior leader of the secessionist Southern Transitional Council (STC), which, with backing from the United Arab Emirates, repeatedly clashed with Saudi puppet forces over the past two years.

Washington’s branding of the Houthis as terrorists for “cross border attack” and inflicting civilian casualties is the height of hypocrisy given the billions of dollars’ worth of weapons along with logistical aid the US has provided Saudi Arabia as it has waged an unrelenting

campaign of bombings that has killed an estimated 100,000 people, most of them civilians.

With basic infrastructure, hospitals and food production deliberately targeted, the war has unleashed the worst humanitarian crisis on the planet. More have starved to death—including 75,000 children under the age of five—than have died from military violence, while at least half the population is facing famine, and the worst cholera epidemic in modern history has infected 1.2 million. On top of this, COVID-19 has begun to spread uncontrollably across Yemen.

For Washington, all of these civilian victims are mere collateral damage in US imperialism’s drive to exert uncontested hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East.

While the State Department’s terrorism charges are entirely fabricated, the impact of the US designation will be all too real.

“Yemen’s faltering economy will be dealt a further devastating blow,” Mohamed Abdi, head of the Norwegian Refugee Council in Sanaa, said, warning that the sanctions imposed together with the “terrorist” designation would “hamstring the ability of aid agencies to respond” to the catastrophic conditions in the country.

Oxfam warned: “The consequences will be felt acutely across a country also hit hard by extreme hunger, cholera and COVID-19, as banks, businesses and humanitarian donors become unwilling or unable to take on the risk of operating in Yemen.”

The terrorist designation constitutes an act of “pure diplomatic vandalism,” said International Rescue Committee CEO David Miliband. “After four years of a failed war strategy that has created the world’s largest humanitarian catastrophe, the last thing the Yemeni people need is further interruption of aid and economic flows.”

While Pompeo claimed that Washington would issue licenses to allow “certain humanitarian activities” to

continue in Houthi-governed territory, the *Washington Post* reported that the US Treasury Department had opposed the designation on the grounds that the conditions of war in Yemen would make it impossible to effectively issue waivers.

Mark Lowcock, head of United Nations emergency relief operations, reported last month that mere reports that Washington was considering a terrorist designation produced a “chilling effect” resulting in a 25 percent reduction in food supplies in November. Banks and other commercial entities refuse to participate in humanitarian transactions out of fear they will run afoul of unilateral US sanctions.

The State Department’s terrorist designation against the Houthis in Yemen is part of a raft of anti-Iranian measures imposed by the Trump administration in the run-up to the scheduled transfer of power to an incoming government led by Democrat Joe Biden on January 20.

These measures have been accompanied by a menacing military buildup in the Persian Gulf, where the USS Nimitz carrier strike group has been deployed, together with a US nuclear submarine, the USS Georgia. Meanwhile, pairs of B-52 heavy bombers have been flown over the Persian Gulf four times in little more than a month.

At the same time, top Trump administration officials and advisers, including Pompeo, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and the president’s son-in-law Jared Kushner have made trips to the region.

The latest official dispatched to the Middle East is Anthony Tata, the retired general and Fox News commentator, who was installed as undersecretary of defense for policy, the number three position at the Pentagon, in a post-election purge ordered by Trump. Tata, a notorious fascist and Islamophobe who denounced Obama as a “terrorist leader,” a “Manchurian candidate” and a Muslim, met with Khalid bin Salman, Saudi deputy minister of defense and royal family member along with other Saudi officials on January 7.

According to the Pentagon readout of the discussion, Tata discussed “the U.S.-Saudi defense partnership, particularly in light of the threats by Iran” and praised the “Kingdom’s commitment to share the responsibility for supporting U.S. forces.”

In concluding its report on Tata’s mission to Riyadh, the Pentagon stated: “The U.S. Department of Defense will continue to execute its mission, including by reassuring allies and partners of our nation’s steadfast resolve, as we uphold our oath of office and the

Constitution.”

In the context of the fascist insurrection instigated by Trump and his supporters on January 6, this seemingly innocuous statement has ominous implications. Those who stormed the Capitol claimed that they too were upholding the Constitution by resisting a “fraudulent” election.

Most foreign policy analysts have cast the frenetic anti-Iranian campaign in the waning days of Trump’s term as an attempt to establish “facts on the ground” that would thwart an attempt by an incoming Biden administration to reset relations with Tehran.

There are growing concerns, however, that Trump and the cabal of fascistic loyalists he has installed at the Pentagon will provoke a war with Iran with the aim of creating a crisis that could be used as the pretext for the imposition of martial law and the upending of the transition of power.

Last Friday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi reported to the Democratic caucus that she had spoken to Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley “to discuss available precautions for preventing an unstable president from initiating military hostilities or accessing the launch codes” for nuclear war. Milley provided a non-committal assurance that safeguards are in place.

Neither Biden, Pelosi nor any section of the Democratic Party leadership are issuing any warning of this danger to the American or world public. On the contrary, the Democrats are seeking to replace Trump with an administration even more committed to the pursuit of US global interests by means of militarist aggression.



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