

Slaughtering School Kids in Yemen: Geneva Conventions Say US Is Complicit

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The United States army supported a Saudi airstrike that hit a bus carrying schoolchildren in Sa'ada, Northern Yemen On August 9.

The students were on a recreational trip. According to the Sa'ada health department, the heartbreaking attack killed at least 51 people. Also according to the International Committee of the Red Cross, at least 40 of those killed were school children, and tens of others were wounded, again mostly children.

If this kind of behavior in the conduct of armed conflict is not the very concept of war crime we don't know what is. As per The Hague Conventions adopted in 1907, warring parties cannot use certain means and methods of warfare. Notably the four 1949 Geneva Conventions and the two 1977 Additional Protocols also focus on the protection of persons not taking part in hostilities. Both Hague Law and Geneva Law identify several of the violations of its norms in the ongoing US-backed, Saudi-led war on Yemen as war crimes. These war crimes can be found in both international humanitarian law and international criminal law treaties, as well as in international customary law as well.

Moreover, the 1949 Geneva Conventions have been ratified by the United States and Saudi Arabia. Many of the rules contained in these treaties have been considered as part of customary law and, as such, are binding on all those countries that have waged an illegal war on the poorest country in the

Arab world.

Given what happened on August 9 in Sa'ada, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court has jurisdiction in respect of US-backed, Saudi war crimes in particular when committed as part of a plan or policy or as part of a large-scale commission of such crimes that are specifically, deliberately and willfully designed to target school children and populated areas in Yemen.

Other breaches include destruction of property protected under the provisions of the relevant Geneva Convention, torture and inhuman treatment of Yemenis in UAE-run prisons, an illegal blockade that is willfully causing great suffering for millions of civilians in besieged cities and communities, extensive destruction and wanton appropriation of schools, hospitals and installations, and intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population.

The important part here is that the United States army has had a heavy hand in all this. The US is supporting the Saudis to commit these grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva Conventions in the knowledge that such attacks will cause incidental loss of life or injury to civilians or damage to civilian objects or widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment which are clearly excessive in relation to the concrete and direct overall military advantage anticipated.

Since the illegal invasion in August of 2015, the US has further sold the Saudis precision-guided munitions; funneled tanks, planes, bombs, and targeting intelligence to Saudi defense officials; and provided material support during bombing runs. Despite increasing reports documenting repeated targeting of Yemeni civilians by Saudi warplanes, with new UN estimates that over 17,000 people have been killed, the Trump administration still intends to resupply Riyadh's arsenal.

These actions are as reprehensible as they are illegal.

Weaponizing the Saudis and the multiple, repeated airstrikes on civilians supported by the US are war crimes. Hospitals, schools, markets and wedding parties are not legitimate military targets. The Americans are either intentionally helping the Saudis target civilians or are deliberately indifferent to the execution of such military operations – either case flies in the face of long-standing international standards of conduct.

Tragic as the August 9's immoral and unlawful airstrike was, there will be no victory for Saudi Arabia and the United States in Yemen. The Americans have no justification to be there and certainly no reason to help Saudis murder innocent school kids in broad daylight either. As per the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the United States is complicit in this callous campaign of murder and destruction and the only clear outcome for the US government has to be further international condemnation, humiliation and shame.

There are international law obligations to accountability and transparency and the world community is expected to push the Saudis and their American partners to stop this madness, to end their wanton disregard for civilian lives, and to be accountable on their crimes against humanity in Yemen.
