



Biden's Doublespeak About Ending Yemen War

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Abby Martin (AM): Joe Biden has made a major announcement that he's taking action to end the Yemen war. This, of course, is encouraging news to the many anti-war organizations who have been fighting to stop this US backed genocide. But with so much at stake, it's important to take a careful look at what Biden actually said. Saudi Arabia and its allied Gulf dictatorships have been bombing the world's poorest country since twenty fifteen to fight the Houthi rebels that they claim threaten them. As a result of the US backed war, Yemen reels from a catastrophic humanitarian crisis where millions teeter on the brink of starvation from a Saudi imposed blockade. According to the UN, eighty percent of Yemen's 30 million people are on the verge of famine. So ending the war, which Biden pledged to do during his campaign, is an urgent necessity. Let's look at how he phrased his policy change during his February fourth foreign policy speech, paying attention to certain key words.

Joe Biden (JB): This war has to end. And to underscore our commitment, we're ending all American support for offensive operations in the war in Yemen.

AM: That sounds like good news and a significant shift from Trump who could have stopped the US backed carnage years ago. But instead, he opted to veto a resolution that would have ended U.S. weapons shipments to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. In fact, one of Trump's last acts was expediting more weapons to the coalition bombing Yemen. But the key word used by Biden here is offensive operations. Why did Biden need to add this qualifier offensive rather than just saying he was ending support for military operations in general? See, according to Saudi Arabia and its allies, the entire war is defensive. In fact, the word defensive was used to justify the US getting into the war in the first place under the Obama Biden administration. Up until now, the US has been providing training, logistical, tactical support for targeting and more. But by the Pentagon's logic, many or even all of these actions could be considered defensive.

In the same speech, Biden said this:

JB: The same time Saudi Arabia faces missile attacks, UAV strikes and other threats from Iranian supplied forces in multiple countries. We're going to continue to support and help Saudi Arabia defend its sovereignty and its territorial integrity and its people.

AM: OK, hold on. This leaves the door open for a lot. It could mean the exact same operations against Yemen will continue, but reframed as defending Saudi sovereignty. Let's look at more of what Biden's statement said.

JB: We're ending all American support for offensive operations in the war in Yemen, including relevant arms sales, including relevant arms sales.

AM: Ending arms sales to the Saudi coalition used to relentlessly bomb poor Yemenis and commit countless war crimes, like that Lockheed Martin bomb that struck a school bus in twenty eighteen, killing at least twenty six children and wounding 19 more would be a very important policy shift. Biden says he's only paused such shipments, implying it's temporary. But why did Biden announce he would be ending relevant arms sales, not arms sales in general? Because he knows the US will continue to sell the same weapons to the war coalition as long as they're officially not relevant to the offensive war. And how is it even possible to monitor how thousands of missiles are used? Adding the word relevant could just be a way out of scrutiny for Biden. Furthermore, Biden seems to only be talking about bombs and airstrikes by the Saudi coalition, this certainly is a major part of the suffering in Yemen, but definitely not all of it. The biggest threat to civilian life right now is the famine, mainly due to the naval blockade of the country. Biden has had no words to address US support for that. And get this, the US itself isn't actually going to stop bombing Yemen. According to national security adviser Jake Sullivan, this decision will have no impact on the US operations in the endless war on terror against the ubiquitous threat of al-Qaeda. So whatever happens with the Saudi Yemen war, the US will still be bombing and drone striking Yemenis. Drone strikes dramatically ramped up under Trump. And it's always civilians who are on the receiving end of these strikes. Another policy shift came from the reversal of Mike Pompeo last minute decision to designate the Houthi rebels a terrorist organization. Biden said Friday he would remove this designation to help Yemen get critical aid. And while that's another positive change. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken is still talking about sanctioning the Houthis, who he claims controls 80 percent of Yemeni territory. If sanctions are imposed on 80 percent of the country, it's kind of hard to see how the humanitarian assistance that's so desperately needed will be distributed even with the removal of the terrorist designation. Yemen's politicians have weighed in on how they view the new administration's actions. Mohammed Ali al Houthi, a member of Yemen's supreme political council, said, quote, "We consider any move that does not end the siege and aggression against Yemen as just a formality and do not pay any attention to it. The US decision to end its involvement in the war and command of the aggressor states is not enough. Washington's allies must also commit themselves to compensate victims and act a package of measures to guarantee the sovereignty of Yemen, recognize its independence and legitimate right to self-defense, and consider any military action either by Arab or foreign states as a criminal act." Biden's

rhetoric could signal not much change on the ground, but the fact that his administration, which includes many figures who were involved in the initial support for the war, feels the need to repudiate Saudi Arabia and change course with overt backing is a testament to the antiwar movement. For instance, just in the week prior to Biden's announcement, a group of activists, including union members, blocked trucks in Hamilton, Ontario, that were involved in shipping armored vehicles to Saudi Arabia to protest the war. It's because of countless direct actions like these that this even happened. And it shows us how crucial grassroots actions are to halt the gears of the military machine. So continuing that pressure is more important now than ever to make sure Biden follows through on this pledge and more, rather than using these statements as a smokescreen to keep himself safe from antiwar criticism. And most importantly, the US empire has been supporting this genocidal war to begin with because of its dedicated support to the Saudi right wing dictatorship, their shared domination of the region, and the fact that the Houthi fight is seen as a proxy war against Iran, which the US is hell bent on destroying. Ending the Yemen war is not enough. These core policies have got to go.

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