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**Hypocrisy and suffering**

The British government’s reluctance in suspending arms sales to Saudi Arabia is not only shameful but also flies in the face of London’s tall claim of working for global peace and stability. London has refused to join the US which recently announced such suspension. The ministers of The Conservative government assert that they have their own policy, claiming that their sale of arms adheres to strict criteria which ensure they do not lead to any breach of humanitarian law.

Ironically, a humanitarian catastrophe has already been looming large on the horizon. More than 100,000 hapless souls have already perished in the conflict that has plunged Yemen into the Stone Age. The barbaric blitzkrieg has been backed and abetted by the most civilized nations of the world that armed the coalition to wreak havoc on the most impoverished country of the world.

Those who believe that their foreign policy and arms sales follow a strict moral code and that such sales do not contribute to the killings of civilians or the destruction of civilian installations should read various human rights organizations’ reports. Citing the Yemen Data Project, the Human Rights Watch noted in its report that more than 17,500 civilians have been killed or wounded in Yemen since 2015. The British ministers who have been unabashedly throwing support behind such arms sales to appease the merchants of death should carefully read that part of the report where it says that a quarter of all civilians killed in air raids were women and children, and ask themselves if their ethical foreign policy and strict criteria of arms sales is really working or if it is creating disaster in a region where people have been craving for peace and security.

The conflict has turned out to be lethal for an ordinary Yemeni who has nothing to do with this politics of war. More than 20 million people in the war-torn country are experiencing food insecurity and ten million of them are at risk of famine. They have suffered in the last five years and there seems to be no respite for them in the coming years. One of the major factors contributing to their suffering is arms sales that scupper every chance of holding peace talks amidst the lucrative arms deals lavished on the aggressors who continue to turn a blind eye on the plight of the Yemeni people and instill fear and terror on the Yemeni people through their war policies.

The Human Rights Watch says it has documented at least 90 apparently unlawful coalition airstrikes, including deadly attacks on Yemeni fishing boats that have killed dozens. Citing the Yemen Data Project, the HRW says that the Saudi-led coalition has conducted more than 20,100 airstrikes on Yemen since the war began, an average of 12 attacks a day. The report says in August 2019, the coalition carried out multiple airstrikes on a Houthi detention center, killing and wounding at least 200 people. The attack was the single deadliest attack since the war began in 2015. The rights watchdog has documented at least five deadly attacks on Yemeni fishing boats since 2018, killing at least 47 Yemeni fishermen.

Despite all this, London appears to be adamant, refusing to listen to members of parliament who represent the British people and the international community that is concerned over the situation in Yemen. Speaking in the Commons, Tobias Ellwood, the Conservative chair of the Defence Committee, urged the UK “to align itself fully with its closest security ally and end similar arms exports connected to the war". The shadow foreign secretary, Lisa Nandy, told MPs “the UK arms trading and technical support sustains the war in Yemen. For British capitalists, however, it is money and profit that reign supreme. Human lives, famines, deaths and miseries of the Yemeni people feature nowhere in its priority list.

It is ironic that the UK is also the UN's pen-holder, which means it is the council member that leads negotiations and drafts legislation on issues related to peace. But in Yemen it is contributing to war and war efforts and Yemeni people are the biggest casualty of this British policy. The British ruling elite should summon courage and leave the council if it cannot come up with plans to end wars and conflicts and instead prefer to stoke more tensions which is likely to inflict deaths and miseries on the Yemeni people.

Unfortunately, after the departure of Jeremy Corbyn from the power corridors of the Labour Party there seems to be no potent voice in the organization that could take up this issue of arms sales. The party is stuffed with New Labour ideologues who seem to be no different from their Conservative counterparts when it comes to arms and arms sales. It is the duty of pro-people organizations in the UK to mobilise against this policy of arms sale that has caused so much misery for the people of the impoverished Arab country. Anti-war activists, organisations against armament, British intellectuals and academics have a duty to let people know the terrible catastrophe that is unfolding in the war-torn country exposing the criminal role of their own ruling elite.

The UK has always supported Washington in its aggressive designs. From the days of the cold war to Operation Enduring Freedom, it has always thrown support behind the American ruling elite. Much of this support has been questionable for the unethical designs that the US followed through its foreign policy, especially the attack on Iraq that contributed to the deaths of more than one million Iraqis besides plunging the country into a sectarian abyss. But it is surprising that the UK is refusing to back a positive initiative of Washington that might go a long way in securing peace.

The US and the UK were the two main suppliers of arms to the anti-Yemen coalition. If the two powerful states really stop all sorts of arms supply, there is a strong chance for peace to prevail. Yemen deserves peace; the UK and other states do not have a right to ruin this chance of peace.

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