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JUAN GONZÁLEZ: We turn now to Yemen, where U.N.-brokered peace talks in the country's nine-month-old civil war are faltering amid disputes between rival factions over the release of prisoners. Meanwhile, local officials have reported intensifying clashes and renewed airstrikes despite an ongoing ceasefire. Over the weekend, airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition that's backed by the U.S. killed 19 Yemeni civilians in their homes and at a market. About half of the nearly 6,000 people killed in Yemen's conflict are civilians, including more than 600 children. Rima Kamal of the International Committee for the Red Cross in Yemen warned of a deepening humanitarian crisis.

RIMA KAMAL: The overall humanitarian situation in Yemen is nothing short of catastrophic. On average, you have 25 people killed in Yemen every day and another 125 that are injured. This has been ongoing for more than eight months by now. The civilian population is suffering on multiple fronts. You have ongoing airstrikes. You have heavy ground fighting. And then you have, on top of that, restrictions on the movement of goods and services.

AMY GOODMAN: The United States has bolstered the Saudi-led coalition's airstrikes in Yemen through arms sales and direct military support. Saudi Arabia is one of the U.S. arms industry's biggest customers. Last month, the State Department approved a billion-dollar deal to restock Saudi Arabia's air force arsenal, which was depleted by its bombing campaign in Yemen. The sale included thousands of air-to-ground munitions and general-purpose bombs. The U.S. and other countries have also reportedly sold internationally banned cluster munitions to Saudi Arabia that are now being used in Yemen.

For more, we're joined by Sharif Abdel Kouddous, who has just returned from Yemen. He's a *Democracy Now!*

correspondent, a fellow at The Nation Institute. And he's recently written a

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for the GlobalPost called "With US help, Saudi Arabia is obliterating Yemen." It's the first of a two-part series on Yemen.

Sharif, start off by just explaining what you found in your weeks-long trip there.

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: Well, I spent most of the time in the Houthi-controlled north of Yemen, and this is an area that's been pounded relentlessly for the past nine months with near-daily airstrikes. You can't visit a city or a town in Yemen without seeing the destruction on the ground. Everything has been hit, from homes to schools, restaurants, bridges, roads, a lot of civilian infrastructure. And with that, of course, comes a lot of the suffering. You know, all parties in this conflict have committed—are guilty of killing civilians. And the Houthi rebels and their allies are implicated in the deaths of hundreds of civilians, mostly by indiscriminate shelling, using landmines, snipers and so forth. But according to the United Nations itself, the majority of civilians killed in this conflict have died as a result of airstrikes. A study in September found that 60 percent have died from these bombardments.

One of the cases that I looked at was the bombing of a wedding in an area called Sanaban, which is a village just south of the capital. This was October 7th, and three brothers were getting married from the same village on the same night. And they—you know, when the wedding was at its peak, you know, the brides had just arrived in a large convoy. Most of the women and children were inside the house. The men were outside in these tents erected outside. The missile smashed into the house, destroying about half of it and setting most of the rest of it on fire. Women were jumping out of the building. And 43 people were killed in the attack, including 16 children. I spoke to one of the surviving grooms, Ayman al-Sanabani. And he—you know, he was hardly even able to fathom what had happened to him. His bride had died, 18 years old, his mother, his father, his younger sister and his younger brother, another one of the grooms. And many people were injured in the attack, very badly burned. One of them is named Abdullah al-Sanabani. He's a child prodigy who won in 2012 a competition and a visit to NASA and gave a TED talk. He now lies in a hospital in Boston. His right arm has been amputated above the elbow, and two of his toes have been removed. So, this is just one of many cases that you see across Yemen, and it's happening while much of the world is really looking the other way. No one really is paying attention to Yemen. It doesn't get much attention in the media. And people, when you talk to them, they say, "Why has the world forsaken us?"

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And, Sharif, what about this Saudi-led coalition? Who's in it? And what level of the bombing? Are we talking here on a daily basis that the bombings are occurring?

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: Yeah, I would say—I mean, it's very hard to get an accurate count, but certainly almost every single day bombs are raining down from across—across Yemen. Apart from sporadic drone strikes by the U.S., Saudi Arabia and the coalition is the only air power above Yemen. This is a coalition made up of mostly Gulf countries, led by Saudi Arabia. The United Arab Emirates is also very heavily involved. And they have been bombing since March 26 on Yemen.

What I think people also need to understand is the level of U.S. complicity in this war. So, as you mentioned at the top, you know, Saudi Arabia is the most avid customer of U.S. weapons and has bought to the tune of \$90 billion over the past five years U.S. arms. What I think many people don't realize is that the United States is also providing crucial intelligence, logistics, targeting assistance, support to the Saudi coalition, provides vital aerial refueling almost every day, with two sorties from tankers almost every day. And there's something called a joint combined planning cell, which is based in Riyadh—this was approved by President Obama—where you have U.S. military personnel meeting on a daily basis with Saudi military leadership, helping to coordinate this war. And so, human rights workers that I talked to said that, you know, the United States is not just a backer of this war, but they are a party to this armed conflict. And that's what people have to understand, is that the United States government is complicit in what is happening in Yemen.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And, in essence, that Yemen has become another growth market for the American arms industry, right? Because the more bombs and more missiles that are dropped, the more that have to be sold—

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: Absolutely.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: —to Saudi Arabia to replace them.

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: This \$1.29 billion deal that was just approved by the State Department last month is to replenish these laser-guided munitions, these smart bombs—so-called smart bombs. And so, this is—

AMY GOODMAN: These are some of the largest U.S. military deals in history.

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: Right. And this is the—

AMY GOODMAN: With Saudi Arabia.

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: You know, Yemen is by far the poorest country in the region, and it's being bombed by the richest.

AMY GOODMAN: Last week, a journalist asked State Department spokesperson John Kirby if the U.S. will support the Yemen ceasefire.

JOHN KIRBY: Yeah?

REPORTER: I have a last question, on Yemen. Yemen's president, Hadi, has asked the Saudi Arabia-led coalition to begin a seven-day ceasefire starting December 15th. You are a part of the coalition. Will you support this ceasefire?

JOHN KIRBY: We welcome the—we welcome the reports of this proposal. And obviously we have to—we have to see how this plays out. But we welcome the reports of the proposal.

AMY GOODMAN: That was John Kirby, State Department spokesperson. Sharif?

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: Well, you know, as you heard, a very tepid response. And the U.S. repeatedly says, you know, "We call on Saudi Arabia to investigate any airstrike where civilians have died," but there's been no investigations done so far. And, you know, a lot of—another case that I looked at was also the bombing of a hospital, and this has happened many times in Yemen. Six hundred hospitals have, or health facilities, have been forced to close from either being hit or from lack of supplies and fuel. But this was a hospital in Haidan, which is a northern town near the Saudi border. It was supported by Doctors Without Borders, the international medical organization. They regularly provided the GPS coordinates to the Saudi coalition. The MSF logo was on the roof of the building. And in late October—and Haidan is a town that's been

really devastated. I mean, everything has been destroyed in the town—schools, a water project. The main road is completely rubble. So this is the one place of sanctuary for people, and it was hit at night while doctors were sleeping in the back or sitting down for dinner. Luckily, no one was killed in the attack, but the place has been completely destroyed, and this will definitely have fatal consequences. It served over 200,000 people in a very remote area, and now people—doctors there who work there said that people will die because of lack of access to healthcare.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And, Sharif, what's the potential here for any kind of a political settlement? I mean, there's the ceasefire that's been announced—

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: Right.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: —between the warring—the factions in the civil war.

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: I mean, it's very tenuous. The stated goal of the Saudi coalition is to reinstate the—what they say is the legitimate president, Hadi. He has very, very little support on the ground in Yemen, and I think most observers would agree this is an unrealistic goal to achieve. One of the problems is the array of groups, different groups, that are fighting now each other in Yemen. They're not all represented at these talks. You have Salafi groups that are fighting. You have southern secessionist groups. And they're not—they don't all have the same goals and the same grievances. And so, really what's been happening in Yemen for the past year is threatening to really tear the country completely apart and bring it to a state where we've seen—

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: So it's more like—it's more like Libya right now.

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: Right, countries like Libya and Syria, which have completely fallen apart. And Yemen is right there on the brink of that. And part of the problem also is a massive, massive humanitarian crisis. As I said, Yemen is the poorest country in the region. This is a place where people were struggling to survive before the conflict. It imports 90 percent of its food and fuel. And now 21 million people are in need of humanitarian aid. I mean, if you think about that number, that's more than double—or just under double the number of people who need aid in Syria.

You have just skyrocketing levels of malnutrition. Three million people have been added to the ranks of the hungry. And there's been millions of people displaced, as well. I went to one camp where, you know, people were living on this sunwashed hill on these rocks, in these tents. They had no money even to buy wood to make fire to bake their bread. And so the children would go out and scavenge for plastic bottles. And they would pile them in the camp, and they'd burn the plastic bottles to make the fire to make this bread, and this toxic ooze would sludge out the bottom. And I said, "Don't you know this is very bad for you?" And they said, "Yes, but otherwise we'll starve. So this is the only way we can eat." Many of them are surviving on just bread and tea. They beg in the streets.

So it's a very, very dire situation. And the most basic of needs in Yemen are not there—food, water, shelter, healthcare. There's hardly any electricity anywhere. So, at night, it's like going back in time. You know, you're wading through darkness, mostly, in Yemen, people walking with flashlights and headlamps. It's becoming one of the greener places, because people are—those who can afford it are buying solar panels. Yemenis are becoming experts in wattage and knowing how to store a battery and things like that. But it's a very dire situation. Like I said, it's not getting the kind of attention that it needs.

AMY GOODMAN: I want to go back to Saudi Arabia's role. The foreign minister, Adel al-Jubeir, speaking on CBS News in September, was asked about the efficacy and accuracy of Saudi airstrikes in Yemen.

ADEL AL-JUBEIR: We are very careful in picking targets. We have very precise weapons. We work with our allies, including the United States, on these targets. We do damage assessments of these targets after they're hit.

AMY GOODMAN: So that was the Saudi foreign minister. "We are very careful" in our targets. Sharif Abdel Kouddous?

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: Well, he should then answer for the thousands of civilians that have been killed by his bombs, by the bombs that are coming down. I mean, it's shocking that there isn't enough—that the U.S. is not putting more pressure, that the United States is not doing its own investigations, given its conduct in the war.

And, I mean, when I was talking about the humanitarian situation, Saudi Arabia and the coalition have imposed a blockade, a siege, on Yemen—this country that is in desperate need for its basic goods. This comes under the rubric of a Security Council resolution to—an arms embargo on the Houthi leadership. But, for example, in September, 1 percent of Yemen's fuel needs entered the country. Fuel affects everything—access for food delivery, electricity. So, Yemenis are slowly being strangled to death.

And there's also—both sides are using aid as a weapon. So, in Taiz, which is a city that—it's Yemen's third-largest city. It's under siege by the Houthis, who are waging a ground battle there. They have really blocked it off, to the extent that people, individuals walking in carrying a bag of groceries, they take the groceries away from them. They take, if they're found to be carrying any medicine or anything like that. So both sides are complicit here, and Yemeni civilians are suffering.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And I wanted to ask you, what's the attitude of the Egyptian government to all of this—I mean, Egypt still being the largest country in the Arab world—to this conflict not very far from their borders?

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: Well, Egypt is part of this coalition. You know, the government of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi is very close to the Saudi Arabian government, which has provided and helped prop up his government with billions of dollars in aid. And so, you know, their policy very closely mirrors Saudi Arabia's. It's hasn't been—sent any troops directly on the ground, but they are part of the coalition.

AMY GOODMAN: Meanwhile, this Committee for Protection of Journalists said that Egypt has now become the second-deadliest place for journalists in the world. Cairo is where you live, Sharif.

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: Not deadliest, most dangerous.

AMY GOODMAN: Most dangerous.

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: So it's the second-worst jailer of journalists in the world after China. It's probably the most rapid deterioration in press freedom in the world. So there's 23, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, reporters who are behind bars. Among them is Mahmoud Abou Zeid, a photojournalist known as Shawkan, who was held for over two years without seeing a judge, which violates even Egypt's own penal code. You have another journalist called Ismail al-Iskandarani, who just arrived back. He knew that he was in danger—

AMY GOODMAN: Ten seconds.

SHARIF ABDEL KOUDDOUS: —if he was going to go back to Egypt, but he had to see his sick mother. He was taken at the airport and is in prison now. So this is the situation that we're living in.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, Sharif, I want you to be very careful when you go back home to Cairo. Sharif Abdel Kouddous, a *Democracy Now!* correspondent, fellow at *The Nation*. His recent [piece](#) is for the GlobalPost, and we'll link to it. It's called "With US help, Saudi Arabia is obliterating Yemen." It's first of a two-part series on Yemen.