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The U.S. is also rapidly expanding military operations in Yemen. The U.S. has reportedly launched more than 49 strikes across the country this month—according to *The New York Times*, that's more strikes than the U.S. has ever carried out in a single year in Yemen. While the U.S. airstrikes have been targeting suspected al-Qaeda operations in Yemen, *The Wall Street Journal* is reporting the U.S. is now offering even more logistical and intelligence support for the Saudi-led war against Yemen's Houthi rebels, who are accused of being linked to Iran. More than 10,000 people have been killed since the U.S.-backed, Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen began two years ago this month. Meanwhile, *The New York Times* is reporting today that the Trump administration has approved the resumption of sales of precision-guided munitions to Saudi Arabia. President Obama froze some of these weapons sales last year due to concern about civilian casualties in Saudi Arabia's expanding war in Yemen. We speak to Iona Craig, a journalist who was based in Sana'a from 2010 to 2015 as the Yemen correspondent for *The Times* of London.

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**NERMEEN SHAIKH:** We turn now to look at Yemen, where the U.S. is also rapidly expanding military operations. The U.S. has reportedly launched more than 49 strikes across the country this month—according to *The New York Times*, that's more strikes than the U.S. has ever carried out in a single year in Yemen. While the U.S. airstrikes have been targeting suspected al-Qaeda operations in Yemen, *The Wall Street Journal* is reporting the U.S. is now offering even more logistical and intelligence support for the Saudi-led war against Yemen's Houthi rebels, who are accused of being linked to Iran. More than 10,000 people have been killed since the U.S.-backed, Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen began two years ago this month. Meanwhile, *The New York Times* is reporting today that the Trump administration has approved the resumption of sales of precision-guided munitions to Saudi Arabia. President Obama froze some of these weapons sales last year due to concern about civilian casualties in Saudi Arabia's expanding war in Yemen.

**AMY GOODMAN:** This all comes as the United Nations is warning Yemen is on the brink of famine. This is U.N. Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien.

**STEPHEN O'BRIEN:** Well, it's not just the number of people who are food insecure, which represents about 14 million out of the 26 million or so Yemenis, which is an enormous number for any nation to have to bear; it's the fact that we have seen an increase in severe acute malnourishment, particularly in young children and in lactating mothers. We have seen a very severe deterioration in the number of patients needing dialysis services, access to oxygen, and where we need to see more antibiotics being brought in and medical facilities made available. These are seriously deteriorating.

**AMY GOODMAN:** To talk more about the situation in Yemen, we go to London to speak with Iona Craig, a journalist who was based in Sana'a from 2010 to '15 as the Yemen correspondent for *The Times* of London. She was in Yemen again last month, where she reported on January's Navy SEAL raid that left 25 civilians and one U.S. Navy SEAL dead.

Iona, welcome back to *Democracy Now!* Talk about the situation on the ground in Yemen right now.

**IONA CRAIG:** Well, as you've already mentioned, the humanitarian situation is certainly getting worse. I went to several of the areas, remote areas, where some of the internally displaced people are finding it increasingly difficult to get access to food and even water. And then, on the military front, there is a stalemate on a lot of the—on the side of the ground war, whilst also a new offensive was actually launched on the Red Sea Coast whilst I was in Yemen in January, that then pushed a lot of the civilian population into these incredibly remote areas where there are no aid agencies to support them and to provide shelter and to provide food. So, across the country, really, it doesn't matter which side of the front line you are, if you're a civilian. People are finding it increasingly difficult to both access food and to be able to afford to pay for food, because many of the government employees have not been paid for more than six, seven months now, and so that reduces people's capacity to even purchase goods, even when they are available, in areas where they're not affected by the conflict.

So, really, there's a massive sense of war weariness amongst the civilian population. People are just really desperate for this war to come to an end, obviously. But certainly, on the political

side, there is no indication that is about to happen. And, in fact, the warring parties are not even willing to even engage or speak with the U.N. special envoy who is charged with trying to find a political resolution to the conflict. So, both on the military front, things are shifting slightly or have done, but certainly, on the humanitarian side, things are getting worse, with the prediction now of wheat supplies soon to run out in perhaps the coming weeks, or certainly in the next two months, that that is only going to get worse, as well.

**NERMEEN SHAIKH:** Well, Iona, as this humanitarian situation is worsening, the Trump administration is reportedly planning changes to the U.S. policy in Yemen. Could you tell us a little about the kinds of changes that are being considered and what their impact would be if they're put into place?

**IONA CRAIG:** So, one thing that appears to have already been changed, from what we've heard, is Yemen now, or parts of Yemen, anyway, being regarded as areas of active hostility. Now, that's quite a technical term, but essentially what it means is those selected areas are put on a war footing the same as Iraq and Afghanistan. So, previously, under the Obama administration, Yemen was considered an area outside of active hostility, so there were different protocols put in place to ensure the prevention of civilian casualties. And it meant that when drone strikes or airstrikes or raids were carried out, that there had to be a near certainty that there were no civilian casualties. Obviously, that didn't always work. I have spent many years covering Yemen, and that included covering incidents of mass civilian casualties under the Obama administration. But now, when that changes to put in parts of the country into areas of active hostility, that near certainty basically gets chucked out of the window, and it means that those civilian casualties are kind of allowed and only have to be proportional. So, that's obviously very concerning for the civilian population in Yemen. We've also seen more military activity, as you've already mentioned, in the form of airstrikes. So that's more military activity, less oversight, because of the way the command structure is now—appears to have been changing, as well, in the sense that the military is going to be allowed to take more decisions on that level without the kind of micromanaging the Obama administration was always accused of, as well as moving these—removing these protocols to—that were supposed to, anyway, protect civilian lives.

In addition to that, now there is talk of the U.S. wanting to become more involved on the side of the Saudi-led coalition, who have, of course, been carrying out this aerial bombing campaign against the Houthi-Saleh forces, who are predominantly in northern Yemen, and have been carrying out this aerial bombing campaign against them, and ground war, since March 2015. Now, the U.S. wants to—has been—has put in a request to become more involved, particularly in an offensive that the Emiratis, the UAE, who are part of the Saudi-led coalition, are looking to launch on the Red Sea Coast, particularly on the port of Hodeidah, which is a vital supply line for northern Yemen, which is the most densely populated part of the country, which relies

heavily on that route for the import of food.

Now, the most troubling part of this request to become more involved with the Saudi-led coalition appears to be because there has been—certainly come out from the White House, from the White House spokesman—this sense of conflating the Houthi rebels, who I mentioned, with Iran. Now, the Houthis have had support from Iran, and that appears to have been increasing, with specific military assistance and weapons to the Houthis over the last nine months. But to call them an Iranian proxy or to conflate them with Iran, it now appears that the—that this almost amounts to the U.S. wanting to start a proxy war with Iran in Yemen. And, of course, that is incredibly dangerous. It's incredibly dangerous for the civilian population, who are already facing famine at the moment, and it's incredibly dangerous because we don't know what the reaction would be from Iran. That reaction may not just be in Yemen. It may be elsewhere in the region, where they're also involved in wars—for example, in Syria. And that's really an unknown quantity. The known quantity is that the civilian population in Yemen will certainly suffer as a consequence of that, if the Americans become more involved in the Saudi-led coalition's efforts in the country.