



Ending U.S. Military Support for the War in Yemen

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America has always prided itself on a foreign policy that promotes values along with core national interests. We support our close allies in many ways, including weapons contracts and military–military cooperation. Military aid and weapons sales are but one tool in our kit, which we use to reward cooperative allies and secure for the United States some influence over the security policy of those allies. Military aid, especially in times of conflict, is supposed to promote security and stability—a core U.S. national security interest.

Unfortunately, Saudi Arabia—one of America’s critical Arab partners—has strained this compact far past its natural breaking point. The United States agreed to a Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen three years ago on premises that turned out not to be true. The war against Yemen’s Houthis was supposed to be short and decisive, dealing a setback to Iranian expansionism while keeping in check the terrorist threat posed by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Instead, today the Houthis are more closely aligned with Iran than before the war. Al Qaeda is stronger than ever in Yemen. And America is deeply implicated in a careless campaign that has destroyed countless human lives.

Our complicity in a disastrous Saudi-led war in Yemen has driven us dangerously far from our bedrock interests of stability and balance in Arabian peninsula, one of the world’s most important source of oil and natural gas.

One of our top priorities should be to disentangle the United States from the disastrous Saudi-led war in Yemen—an initiative

already supported by a bipartisan group of lawmakers.¹ American policy in the Gulf cannot be subsidiary to weapons sales: major contracts must be reassessed so that they serve American policy interests, rather than drive them. Furthermore, a principled and strategically sound recalibration on Yemen can spur an even more important process: the revival of congressional oversight of America’s wars. It’s time to begin reversing the militarization of foreign policy and rethinking the logic of America’s reflexive and unconstrained global war on terror.

United States’ assistance to the Saudi-led coalition primarily consists of aerial targeting assistance, intelligence sharing, and regular refueling of Saudi and UAE aircraft.² However, the United States has also provided much of the coalition’s military equipment. Under the Obama administration, the United States agreed to sell approximately \$112 billion worth of military equipment—including aircraft, helicopters, and air defense missiles—to Saudi Arabia.³

Congress can and should pass resolutions against the existing arms contracts connected to the war, and it can demand that the administration provide compelling national security arguments to continue any sales. For instance, the administration could easily convince Congress to approve sales of defensive weaponry, like anti-missile batteries that could protect Saudi Arabia from Houthi Scud missiles. Furthermore, Congress can and should demand that the administration fulfill its existing reporting requirements. Members of Congress have asked tough direct questions that the Pentagon can answer about the impact of

American refueling, and the nature and impact of targeting intelligence.

Those measures alone, however, will not be enough. Congress ought to write new legislation that imposes far more substantive reporting and certification obligations on the administration. Legislation with more teeth would make it much harder for the administration to treat certification as a hollow pro forma exercise. Such legislation should not allow for national security waivers, which in the past have been used by administrations to sidestep Congressional oversight. Tougher legislation would also suspend ongoing sales if the administration does not actively fulfil its reporting requirements.

The Pentagon has an affirmative obligation to prove that its actions are fulfilling the United States' stated aims—in the case of the Yemen War, that U.S. actions are advancing strategic aims and reducing civilian casualties. Right now, the opposite is true; American complicity in Yemen is eroding American stature and policy goals. Ending American complicity will not only contribute to ending the tragedy in Yemen: it will realign our policy practice with our strategic goals. The moral and strategic benefits are clear.

Notes

1 Thanassis Cambanis and Michael Wahid Hanna, "The War in Yemen Is a Tragedy—and America Can End Its Complicity," The Century Foundation, October 24, 2018, <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/war-yemen-tragedy-america-can-end-complicity/>.

2 Melissa Dalton, Hijab Shah, and Timothy Robbins, "U.S. Support for Saudi Military Operations in Yemen," Center for Strategic & International Studies, March 23, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-support-saudi-military-operations-yemen>.

3 William D. Hartung, "U.S. Arms Transfers to Saudi Arabia and the War in Yemen," *Security Assistance Monitor*, September 7, 2016, http://securityassistance.org/fact_sheet/us-arms-transfers-saudi-arabia-and-war-yemen#_edn12.