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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

SEPTEMBER 25, 2018

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26.09.2018

Destroying Yemen as Humanely as Possible



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What a relief to learn that even though Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are bombing the crap out of Yemen, they are doing so humanely. On September 12, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, pursuant to the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 (“NDAA”), [certified](#) that Saudi Arabia and the UAE are “undertaking demonstrable actions to reduce the risk of harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure” in their war on Houthi rebels in [Yemen](#).

This was demonstrable horseshit. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights released a report on Yemen at the end of August. [Kamel Jendoubi](#), chairperson of the Group of International and Regional Eminent Experts on Yemen which authored the report, stated: “There is little evidence of any attempt by parties to the conflict to minimize civilian casualties.” This puts the lie to Secretary of Defense James Mattis’ claim that the US military presence in Yemen helps to restrain the Saudis.

Nevertheless, Pompeo had to make the certification. Not to do so would mean the Trump Administration could not continue to assist the Saudi-led war effort. Those were the terms Congress had set in Section 1290 of the NDAA. Pompeo’s action would become understandable very shortly.

On September 20, the [Wall Street Journal](#) disclosed that Secretary Pompeo had decided to bless the Saudi coalition’s conduct after the State Department’s Bureau of Legislative Affairs advised him that withholding certification could jeopardize future US arms sales, including a pending sale of more than 120,000 precision-guided missiles to the Saudis and UAE. The seller in the \$2 billion deal is Raytheon, one of the five largest US arms makers. Oh, in case you’re interested, the State Department’s legislative affairs team is headed by Acting Assistant Secretary of State [Charles Faulkner](#), a Trump appointee, who was a lobbyist for Raytheon until he joined the State Department in June.

Ending an Illegal War

Since 2015, the US, under both the Obama and Trump administrations, has provided the Saudi coalition with arms, intelligence, targeting advice, and in-air refueling of warplanes—without Congressional authorization as required by the US Constitution.^[1]

Some Members of Congress are trying to end the unconstitutional US involvement in the war by invoking the [1973 War Powers Resolution](#). Invoking the War Powers Resolution would compel the Trump Administration to terminate military action in Yemen unless the White House gets Congress to authorize the US role in the war.

Congress has already tried twice, unsuccessfully, to invoke the War Powers Resolution. The resolution introduced in the House in September, 2017 never came to a vote. A second resolution was tabled by the Senate in March of this year.

On September 6, eleven House Democrats [announced](#) that they would make a third attempt, this time in the form of a [privileged resolution](#), a parliamentary maneuver which means that the resolution can’t be tabled; it has to be voted up or down. Which will it be?

Why Are We in Yemen?

The War Powers Resolution has a better chance at success this time around. Thanks to the *Journal*, Washington's stated justifications for supporting the Saudi coalition appear questionable. Washington says that the US must support the Saudis in order to oppose Iran which is backing the Houthis. Washington also says that the US must fight Al-Qaeda's local branch, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), as well as ISIS. Never mind that AQAP has only grown as strong as it has due to the chaos of the war.

No, following the *Journal* exposé, it looks an awful lot like the US is in Yemen simply to fatten the wallets of US arms dealers. "Saudi Arabia is a very wealthy nation," President Trump said during Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman's visit to the White House in March, "and they're going to give the United States some of that wealth, hopefully, in the form of jobs, in the form of the *purchase of the finest military equipment* anywhere in the world."^[2]

The US must end this monstrously destructive and illegal war. Speaking in 2016, [Bruce Reidel](#) of the Brookings Institution said that "if the United States of America and the United Kingdom told King Salman that this war has to end, it would end tomorrow." The antiwar movement must put pressure on the White House to see that this happens. Peace activists must push Congress to invoke the War Powers Resolution as well as block arms sales to the Saudis. The left must insist on a Congressional ethics investigation and must also demand the resignations of Pompeo and Acting Assistant Secretary of State Charles Faulkner.

Notes.

^[1] For anyone just beginning to learn about the conflict in Yemen, a recent [article](#) by political scientist Rajan Menon, *Yemen's Descent into Hell: a Saudi-American War of Terror*, TOMDISPATCH (Sept. 20, 2018), is a fine way to get up to speed.

^[2] [Remarks](#) by President Trump and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Before Luncheon, whitehouse.gov, Mar. 20, 2018 (emphasis added).