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Firing of State Department inspector general tied to Saudi arms deal

The firing last Friday of the US State Department’s inspector general, Steve Linick, may have been driven by his probe into the Trump administration’s declaration of a national emergency in a bid to push through \$8 billion worth of arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates without Congressional approval, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee charged on Monday.

The media had previously focused on reports of an investigation into US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s misuse of State Department resources and staff for his personal benefit, ordering aides to walk his dog and using government planes to fly himself and his wife to Kansas, where Pompeo has reportedly considered a run for the US Senate.

Linick, however, was investigating issues of a far more substantial character, involving a criminal US foreign policy and the Trump administration’s riding roughshod over the US Constitution and the separation of powers to achieve its objectives.

“I have learned that there may be another reason for Linick’s firing,” House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Eliot Engel said in a statement Monday. “His office was investigating—at my request—Trump’s phony declaration of an emergency so he could send weapons to Saudi Arabia.”

Engel added, “We don’t have the full picture yet, but it’s troubling that Secretary Pompeo wanted Mr. Linick pushed out before this work could be completed.” He demanded that the administration turn over all records from the inspector general’s probe.

Senator Chuck Grassley, the most senior Republican in the Senate, sent a letter to the White House Monday demanding a “detailed reasoning” for the firing of Linick, while warning that the inspector general “should be free from partisan political interference from either the Executive or Legislative branch.”

Linick is the fourth inspector general to be fired by Trump in the last six weeks. While it is within the president’s power to appoint and remove such figures at will, doing so to cover up criminal activity would itself constitute a crime.

Pompeo claimed that he knew nothing of Linick’s investigation into his own activities, but had nonetheless asked Trump to fire the inspector general. “I went to the President and made clear to him that Inspector General Linick wasn’t performing a function in a way that we had tried to get him to, that was additive for the State Department ...” Pompeo had refused to meet with the State Department IG to discuss the national emergency declaration over the arms deals.

The action taken by the administration in May 2019 invoked a provision of the Arms Control Act allowing the White House to bypass the normal 30-day congressional notification period for arms sales if the president declares a national emergency. This ensured that Congress could not put a hold on any of the arms deals with the Persian Gulf oil monarchies.

Both Democratic and Republican administrations have for decades poured billions of dollars of arms into Saudi Arabia, aiding the monarchy in both suppressing domestic opposition and playing a role as a pillar of reaction and US imperialist domination in the Middle East.

However, the vicious October 2018 murder of the influential Saudi journalist and former regime insider Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, as well as unending reports of mass civilian casualties resulting from US-supplied Saudi warplanes dropping US-made bombs and missiles on Yemen, had created enough qualms in Congress to threaten at least a temporary snag in consummating the lucrative arms deals.

Concerns among both Democratic and Republican legislators stemmed from the fear that the blatant crimes of the Saudi regime, in torturing murdering and dismembering Khashoggi, and dropping bombs on funerals, school buses, hospitals and homes in Yemen, could hamper US efforts to cloak its imperialist interventions in the Middle East and elsewhere under the banners of “human rights” and “democracy.”

Legislation calling for an end to US support for the near-genocidal Saudi war against the people of Yemen, while winning support in both the House and Senate, was easily quashed by Trump, without sufficient votes in the Senate to override his veto.

Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen began in 2015 and was waged with the indispensable aid of the Obama administration, which not only pushed through multi-billion-dollar arms deals, but also provided key logistical support from the Pentagon, including the mid-air refueling of Saudi bombers and the deployment of US warships to enforce a blockade aimed at starving the country's population into submission.

While arms sales during Obama's second term in office rose to \$36 billion a year, once the murderous war in Yemen was handed over to the Trump administration, it climbed to an average of \$51 billion a year during his first three years in office.

The declaration of a national emergency one year ago to fast-track arms deals by precluding congressional oversight was justified in the name of countering Iran's "malign activities" in the Middle East, while falsely casting Yemen's Houthi rebels as an Iranian "proxy" force.

The determination to push through the arms deal at all costs was driven by both the profit interests of massive military contractors such as Raytheon, which has supplied most of the bombs that have killed Yemeni men, women and children, and the determination to strengthen the alliance with Saudi Arabia maintained by successive Republican and Democratic administrations as the centerpiece of an effort to build a common front between the Gulf oil monarchies, Israel and the US to isolate, destabilize and prepare direct military intervention against Iran.

The use of the fabricated "national emergency" to achieve these aims, along with the firing of the State Department inspector general for investigating these actions, lay bare the insoluble connection between the buildup to imperialist war abroad and the systematic dismantling of even the vestiges of democratic forms of rule at home.

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