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## Military Aid As a Tool to Achieve U.S Foreign Policy Goals

PETER KORZUN

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On September 21, the U.S. Senate cleared the way for a \$1.15 billion sale of tanks and other military equipment to Saudi Arabia, dismissing a bipartisan bill that would have blocked the weapons shipment to Saudi Arabia.

The weapons sale includes over 153 Abrams tanks, 20 armored vehicles, over 400 machine guns and more than 6,600 rounds of ammunition. Many of the tanks in the package are to replace ones lost by Saudi Arabia in the war. During the tenure of President Obama, the U.S. States has sold roughly \$100 billion worth of weapons and military equipment to the kingdom.

The bipartisan resolution to block the weapons sale was rejected much to the chagrin of peace groups and rights advocates who wanted to end the U.S. support for the war waged by Saudi Arabia in Yemen. The supporters of the bill said Saudi Arabia needed help in its confrontation with Iran. The Saudi government frequently describes the Houthis as an Iranian proxy in order to justify their bombing campaign. Opponents of the US aid to Saudi Arabia have argued that Iranian support for the Houthis is very limited, and that the war in Yemen is a civil war, not a proxy war.

The Saudi Arabia-led coalition airstrikes are responsible for the majority of the 10,000 people killed in the conflict, nearly a third of all Saudi air raids have hit civilian targets, including markets, factories, mosques, schools, or hospitals.

During the floor debate, Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) echoed the opinion of those who supported the aid package saying «This is a sale that benefits us». Although the senator admitted Saudi Arabia was not a «perfect ally» and that many civilians had been killed in Yemen, he argued that the massive sale of new weapons should be approved because it will benefit the U.S. economically. That's what it's all about - the military industrial complex seems to be a winner again.

«We now have a war in Yemen, and yes we are directly involved in that war», said Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., adding «And yes, this is a vote not just about weapons; this is a vote about whether we should be at war in Yemen».

Saudi Arabia launched an operation against Yemen in March 2015, after Houthi rebels from Northern Yemen overran the capitol, Sanaa, to dispose President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi backed by Saudi Arabia. The U.S. supported the mission with intelligence and logistics, including refueling aircraft, and weapons supplies.

The administration did not respond to the letter signed by 60 members of Congress requesting that the transfer be delayed, Senators Rand Paul, R-Ky., and Chris Murphy, D-Conn., members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, introduced a resolution to block the sale. This resolution was shelved on September 21 with the Senate paving the way for US indirect involvement in the Yemen conflict.

It should be noted that the U.S. was directly involved in the Yemen war at least since May sending special operators there with warships patrolling in the proximity of country's shore.

The Senate vote took place just a few days after the US and Israel signed a new military-assistance deal on September 14. The pact is worth \$38 billion over the course of a decade, an increase of roughly 27 percent on the money pledged in the last agreement, which was signed in 2007 - the biggest package of military assistance in its history. The aid totals \$3.8 billion a year — up from \$3.1 billion the U.S. gave Israel annually under the current 10-year deal that expires in 2018.

The deal also directs more money back toward the United States. It eliminates a provision in the previous aid agreement that allowed Israel to spend 26 percent of its Foreign Military Financing on weaponry and other resources produced within Israel, rather than in the U.S. - a provision intended to help Israel build its own defense industry. Now the money will go toward purchases benefitting the defense industry in the United States.

The U.S. and Israel have been divided over Iran and ways to tackle the Palestinians problem, as well as some other issues, but it did not prevent America from rendering the huge aid package making the U.S indirectly entangled in the conflicts Israel may be involved in.

The massive military aid to Israel and Saudi Arabia is indicative of the kind of influence the U.S. military industrial complex has on the national foreign policy. The money allocated for this purpose turns into welfare for the wealthy weapons manufacturers in America. Israel and Saudi Arabia are rich countries with great military potential of their own. One can hardly imagine they need outside help.

Israel is a leader in military technology and a country boasting high living standards. Israel's standard of living was ranked 18<sup>th</sup> in the world based on the UN Human Development Index in 2015. Israel's ranking was higher than many Western European countries including Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and Austria.

It is considered a high-income country by the World Bank. Still the U.S. provides a huge military package to it at the time its national economy faces great problems.

There is another factor to influence this decision. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee AIPAC is the most prominent governmental lobbying organization on behalf of Israel. Fortune Magazine typically rates it as the second most powerful lobby in the U.S.

The organization exerts great influence on American politics, especially in the current election campaign. According to Fortune, AIPAC «has got serious juice when it comes to Washington politicking. The group has one of the most sophisticated lobbying efforts around, including a highly professional set of lobbyists on the Hill who know how to get congressman to vote their way when it comes to issues affecting Israel. They also have representatives throughout the country who can lobby congressman from their home districts».

The same way Saudi Arabia has spent millions of dollars on U.S. law, lobby and public relations firms to raise the country's visibility in the United States. The Saudi government, embassy and government-owned entities have been contracting with U.S. consulting firms including Podesta Group, BGR Government Affairs, DLA Piper and Pillsbury Winthrop, for more than 30 years.

The work ranges from years-long agreements for legislative advice to one-time PR outreach efforts during «VIP visits» of Saudi leaders to Washington and New York.

Providing weapons and training to foreign military forces is a centerpiece of the Obama administration's foreign policy. Billions of dollars on military aid to foreign governments are spent yearly around the world to increase American influence. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, military assistance has increased and gone to more countries. The United States is proposing to provide military assistance to 137 countries in fiscal year 2017. There has been little effort to evaluate the effectiveness of programs.

The «train and equip» program in Syria collapsed. In 2014 U.S.-trained Iraqi forces dropped weapons and ran away from Islamic State militants, despite the fact that they had significant superiority in weapons and numbers. In Yemen, \$500 million of U.S. military equipment was lost to end up with the Houthi rebels or al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula is another case in point. Saudi Arabia used U.S. weapons to quell public discontent in Bahrain and kill innocent civilians in Yemen, where U.S. military aid exacerbated the conflict instead of facilitating its resolution.

The military aid to Pakistan has not made Islamabad adopt pro-U.S. policies. Massive military aid to Afghanistan has failed to bring stability to the war-torn nation. The U.S. hoped its support and financial backing for resource rich southern Sudan would enlarge the U.S. footprint in Africa as well as provide a big economic payoff for U.S. corporations. Instead, the America-supported secession from Sudan has backfired as a civil war tore the new state apart.

Quite often America's aid to friendly, but undemocratic governments promotes terrorism.

U.S. trained officers staged military coups in Burkina Faso and Mali.

A powerful nation can become dependent on countries it aids. The amount of military aid may reflect the extent of reliance on a given nation – things like military presence or supplies of minerals, for instance. In this perspective, the military aid providing nation may become more dependent of the recipient than vice versa. A strong client may dictate its own terms.

The United States keeps on throwing its weight around to influence the situation in the world, but refuses to take any responsibility for multiple negative results that emanate from its constant military and political interventions in the affairs of other states and regions.

The military assistance is part and parcel of foreign policy based on the complex network of alliances and security commitments entangles the United States in militarized conflicts that are not vital to the national interest but guarantee huge profits to big defense oriented corporations to make them richer at the expense of America's tax payers.