



Saudi Arabia rents US military

By Doug Bandow

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After killing hundreds of Yemenis, including many civilians, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia announced that it was halting its bombing campaign. Then Riyadh restarted bombing the next day.

The Obama administration is part of Saudi Arabia's 10-member "coalition" against Houthi rebels in Yemen said. Secretary of State John Kerry: "We're not going to step away from our alliances and our friendships."

Alas, the entire campaign is built on a lie. Contrary to Riyadh's claims, the Houthis are not directed by, and seem only barely supported by, Iran. Even British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond admitted that "the Houthis are clearly not Iranian proxies."

Instead, the rebels have been fighting for years. America's then-ally, President Ali Abdullah Saleh battled the Houthis a decade ago.

But after Saleh was ousted in 2012, he allied with the Houthis against his successor, President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi. The newly empowered rebels — many of the official security forces remained loyal to Saleh — ousted Hadi last fall.

Those familiar with Yemeni politics agreed that none of this had anything to do with Iran or Saudi Arabia. Argued journalist Peter Salisbury, the conflict, like previous fights, was "driven by local issues and competition for resources rather than regional or ideological rivalries."

The KSA claims that it wants to restore Hadi to power. But his followers largely abandoned him after he fled into exile and endorsed Saudi airstrikes on his fellow citizens.

Yemen's political turbulence is largely irrelevant to the U.S.; America's only serious security concern is the al-Qaida affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). But the Houthis

hate AQAP as much as they dislike America. Unfortunately, AQAP has gained in the chaos worsened by Saudi Arabia.

Secretary Kerry sounded like a late-night comedian when he announced that the U.S. was "not going to stand by while the region is destabilized or while people engage in overt warfare across lines, international boundaries and other countries." Washington engages in such behavior regularly.

Moreover, on any normal measure Riyadh is far more inimical to American interests than Iran. Saudi Arabia is a totalitarian theocratic gerontocracy.

In contrast to Kuwait and even Iran, there are no elections, political opposition, or dissenting viewpoints in Saudi Arabia. Anyone who voices criticism is treated as if they were in the Soviet Union.

The State Department's latest human rights assessment noted that "citizens lack the right and legal means to change their government; pervasive restrictions on universal rights such as freedom of expression, including on the Internet, and freedom of assembly, association, movement, and religion; and a lack of equal rights for women, children, and noncitizen workers." The report went on to cite "torture and other abuses."

The KSA is even more restrictive when it comes to religious liberty. For instance, the Saudis long have underwritten the intolerant Wahhabist theology around the world, including in America.

Spiritual oppression is complete. Not one church, synagogue, temple, or other house of worship operates in the KSA. Gathering together privately in a home is enough for arrest.

The KSA's international policies are equally bad. Saudi Arabia was one of just three governments to recognize the Afghan Taliban. Saudis generously funded Saudi Osama bin-Laden and his al-Qaeda prior to 9/11.

The Kingdom's malign role continues. A 2009 WikiLeaks document indicated that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton acknowledged that "Donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide."

In Syria the Saudi government has financed and supplied extremist Syrian rebels. In neighboring Bahrain Riyadh sent in troops to back the repressive Sunni monarchy.

Yet President Barack Obama is holding the Saudi royals' coats as they intervene in the Yemeni

civil war.

U.S. policymakers have sold American values for a pittance largely because of oil. However, the Saudi royals always needed to sell their oil to fund their brutal repression and lavish lifestyles. Moreover, U.S. reliance on foreign supplies, in what always has been a global market, is down dramatically.

Yet the one-way relationship continues. President Obama praised the late King Abdullah's "steadfast and passionate belief in the importance of the U.S.-Saudi relationship as a force for stability and security in the Middle East." Of course the royals believe in the "alliance." It's cheaper to borrow U.S. forces than hire bodyguards.

But that might not be enough in the future. The royal system's vulnerabilities are only likely to grow. The danger of making a pact with the devil, as America has done with Riyadh, is that you risk being locked in the devil's embrace, like in Yemen.

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