



Sen. Sanders shares speech on Yemen war resolution

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Sanders' Prepared Remarks for Floor Speech on Yemen War Powers Resolution

WASHINGTON, March 13 – Sen. Bernie Sanders will deliver remarks on the Senate floor this afternoon to begin debate on the resolution to end U.S. support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen. The Senate will vote on the resolution later today.

Here are the full remarks:

Mr. President,

Let me thank Senators Lee and Murphy for their hard work on this resolution – work which has now gone on for several years.

Today is an extremely important day.

Today, we in the Senate have the opportunity to take a major step forward in ending the horrific war in Yemen, and alleviating the terrible suffering of the people in one of the poorest countries on earth.

And today, equally important, we can finally begin the process of reasserting the Congress' responsibility over war making. As every school child should know, Article I of the Constitution clearly states that it is Congress, not the president, that has the power to declare war. In their great wisdom, the Framers gave that enormously important responsibility to Congress because the members of the House and Senate are closer and more accountable to the people.

Tragically, over many years, Congress has abdicated that responsibility to Democratic presidents and Republican presidents. Today, we begin the process of reclaiming our constitutional power by ending U.S. involvement in a war that has not been authorized by Congress and is clearly unconstitutional

Last December, this body made history. For the first time since the War Powers Resolution was passed in 1973, a majority of United States Senators – 56 of us – used those powers to end U.S. involvement in a war. Today we consider that exact same resolution again. This time, however, unlike last session, this resolution will be brought to the House floor and likely passed.

Let me say a brief word about the war in Yemen. In March of 2015, under the leadership of Muhammad bin Salman, then Saudi defense minister and now the crown prince, a Saudi-led coalition intervened in Yemen's ongoing civil war. As a result of that intervention, Yemen is now experiencing the worst humanitarian disaster in the world.

According to the United Nations, Yemen is at risk of the most severe famine in more than 100 years, with some 14 million people facing starvation. In one of the poorest countries on earth, as a result of this war, according to the Save the Children organization, some 85,000 children have already starved to death over the last several years, and millions more face death if the war continues.

Further, Yemen is currently experiencing the worst cholera outbreak in the world with as many as 10,000 new cases each week, according to the World Health Organization. This is a disease spread by infected water that causes severe diarrhea and dehydration and will only accelerate the death rate. The cholera outbreak has occurred because Saudi bombs have destroyed Yemen's water infrastructure and people are no longer able to access clean water.

The fact is that the United States, with little media attention, has been Saudi Arabia's partner in this horrific war. We have been providing the bombs the Saudi-led coalition is using, refueling their planes before they drop those bombs and assisting with intelligence. In too many cases, our weapons are being used to kill civilians. In August, it was an American-made bomb that obliterated a school bus full of young boys, killing dozens and wounding many more. A CNN report found evidence that American weapons have been used in a string of such deadly attacks on civilians since the war began.

This past weekend, at least 20 women and a child were killed in a Saudi-led airstrike on Yemen's northwestern province of Hajjah, as they huddled in a house to avoid nearby clashes. As is so often the case in war, the innocent pay the price.

Late last year, I met with several brave Yemeni human rights activists. They had come to urge Congress to put a stop to this war, and they told me clearly: when Yemenis see "Made in USA" on the bombs that are killing them, it tells them that the U.S.A. is responsible for this war. That's the sad truth.

Mr. President, the bottom line is the United States should not be supporting a catastrophic war led by a despotic regime with a dangerous and irresponsible foreign policy.

Some have suggested that Congress moving to withdraw support for this war would undermine United Nations efforts to reach a peace agreement. But the opposite is true: It is the promise of unconditional US support for the Saudis that undermines those efforts.

And we have evidence for this. Last December, as we were preparing to vote on this same resolution, we got news that UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths got a breakthrough agreement for a cease fire in the port city of Hodeidah, which is enabling food and increased humanitarian aid into the country.

I have spoken to people to at the highest level, who have made it clear that our actions here in the Senate have played a significant role in pushing Saudi Arabia toward an agreement. That pressure must continue, and the resolution that we will pass today will do just that.

So our effort on this issue has clearly made a positive impact, and I thank all of my co-sponsors and all of the many civil society organizations – progressive and conservative organizations – who have worked so hard to raise awareness of this conflict and the constitutional implications.

Above and beyond the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, this war has been harmful to our national security and the security of the region. The administration defends our engagement in Yemen by

overstating Iranian support for the Houthi rebels. Let me be clear: Iran's support for the Houthis is of serious concern for all of us. But the truth is, that support is far less significant than the administration claims. And, the fact is, that the relationship between Iran and the Houthis has only been strengthened by this war. The war is creating the very problem the administration claims to want to solve.

This war is also undermining the broader effort against violent extremists. A 2016 State Department report found that the conflict had helped Al Qaeda and the Islamic State's Yemen branch "deepen their inroads across much of the country." As the head of the International Rescue Committee, former British Foreign Minister David Miliband, said in a recent interview, "The winners are the extremist groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS." Late last year, the Wall Street Journal reported, and I quote: "Nearly two years after being driven from its stronghold in Yemen, one of al Qaeda's most dangerous franchises has entrenched itself in the country's hinterlands as a devastating war creates the conditions for its comeback."

And here is something that should deeply concern all of us: At a time when we are spending billions to fight terrorism all over the world, a February CNN report revealed that Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners have transferred American-made weapons to al Qaeda-linked fighters in Yemen. Does anybody here think it makes sense that U.S. weapons should be given to groups who have declared war against the United States?

So this war is both a humanitarian AND a strategic disaster.

And let us not forget that this war is being led by a despotic, undemocratic regime. The United States of America, the most powerful country on earth, should not be led into a regional war by our client states trying to serve their own narrow and selfish interests. Saudi Arabia is a monarchy controlled by one of the wealthiest families in the world — the Saud family. In a 2017 report by the Cato Institute, Saudi Arabia was ranked 149th out of 159 countries for freedom and human rights. Is this really the kind of country whose foreign policy we should be supporting with U.S. taxpayer dollars?

For decades, the Saudis have funded schools, mosques, and preachers who promote an extreme form of Islam known as Wahabbism.

In Saudi Arabia today, women are treated as third class citizens. Women still need the permission of a male guardian to go to school or get a job, have to follow a strict dress code, and can be stoned to death for adultery, or flogged for spending time in the company of a man who is not their relative.

Last year, Saudi activist Loujain al-Hathloul, a leader in the fight for women's rights, was kidnapped from Abu Dhabi and forced to return to the country. She is currently imprisoned along with many other human rights activists. Human Rights Watch reported that imprisoned women activists have been subjected to torture, including electric shocks, and other forms of physical and sexual assault.

The people of the entire world received a very clear understanding of the nature of the Saudi regime with the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Turkey. All of the evidence suggests that the Saudi Crown Prince was directly responsible for that murder. Is that the kind of regime whose lead we should be following?

Mr. President, I believe that the U.S. Congress has become far too comfortable with military interventions all over the world. We have now been in Afghanistan for nearly 18 years, the longest war in American history. We also have troops in many other countries around the world. The time is long overdue for Congress to reassert its constitutional role in determining when and where our country goes to war. This resolution provides that opportunity, and I hope that this body will take that opportunity just as we did in December.

The humanitarian catastrophe has only gotten worse in Yemen, and our intervention there is every bit as unconstitutional as it was when we passed this resolution in December.

Let us bring this catastrophic war in Yemen to an end and focus our efforts on the diplomatic resolution and humanitarian aid that is so desperately needed.