

DAILY NEWS

How Trump is empowering the Saudi destruction of Yemen

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The Trump administration seems to have abandoned the possibility of a diplomatic resolution to the Saudi-led destruction of Yemen. In his first few weeks in office Trump approved a disastrous Navy SEAL raid in the interior, parked a guided missile destroyer with history in Yemen off its coast, and now might approve major arms shipments to Arab Gulf states currently under scrutiny for war crimes in the country.

Five days after being sworn in, Trump approved a Navy SEAL operation over an intimate dinner with aides that would later rain bullets down on a rural Yemeni town. Although the White House promoted the operation as a "success," it looks more like a very public, very tragic failure.

Not only was the primary al-Qaeda target not there, but a chaotic shootout unfolded that reportedly ended up killing 25 civilians, including nine children under the age of 13. One of the SEALs, Chief Petty Officer William Owens, was also killed. On top of that, the Yemeni government responded by withdrawing permission for future counterterrorism operations.

The New York Times reported that Yemen issued an outright ban on U.S. commando operations, a report that was later watered down by the Washington Post. It nonetheless signaled that the new administration needs to tread carefully in the future, lest they jeopardize regional counterterrorism objectives.

But not all of Trump's decisions on Yemen have such a clear-cut counterterrorism focus. Saudi Arabia and its Gulf Cooperation Council coalition partners have waged war on Houthi rebels with nebulous ties to Iran for almost two years-and Trump now seems eager to assist them.

In his last months in office, President Obama took steps to reduce U.S. involvement following international criticism of Saudi Arabia's indiscriminate bombing practices. The Saudis and their coalition partners have steadily racked up a high civilian death toll that was beginning to tarnish the reputation of their Western patrons. Trump, however, appears eager to cozy back up to America's reckless Gulf clients.

Following a Houthi attack on a Saudi frigate, the U.S. Navy deployed a guided missile destroyer to the Gulf of Aden off the Yemeni coast in a misguided signal of solidarity with the Saudi cause. The Navy didn't send just any guided missile destroyer-they sent the USS Cole. Al Qaeda targeted the Cole in an attack of the coast of Yemen in 2000 that killed 17 sailors. The Navy

avoided deploying the ship to the Middle East ever since. Until now, that is, when they've parked it back on Yemen's doorstep.

By taking such an assertive stance, Trump gave hope to the Gulf state coalition that he may increase American assistance in the coming months. According to the Washington Times, quoting "sources close to the government in Riyadh," the Saudi Foreign Minister in particular is "very, very up" about the developments and the prospect of American support. It seems the foreign minister's optimism is warranted, with the White House also possibly approving an arms shipment of precision-guided munitions that Obama blocked in December. The precision-guidance kits in question would upgrade the bombs that Saudi Arabia and its friends are using to target Yemeni schools and hospitals.

A Trump administration official told the Washington Times last week, "If they're going to drop stuff, it should be precision-guided rather than dumb." Sources close to the Saudi government say the Kingdom would also "appreciate an increased supply of precision munitions and much broader sharing of intelligence..." I'm sure they would. That doesn't make it a good idea.

While other Western nations debate cutting Saudi Arabia off completely from their arms exports in an effort to mitigate wanton destruction, it seems that Washington is just happy they're buying American.

With an inexperienced hot-head at the Resolute Desk relying on an aide who believes we're overdue for another global war, it's hard to be optimistic about their commitment to diplomacy. We can only hope that somehow Trump's love of a good deal will steer his administration towards more diplomatic action and less of a "shoot first, spin later" mentality.

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