

Why Is Trump Backing Saudi's Murderous Attacks on Yemen?

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The United States is helping one of the most vicious authoritarian regimes in the world bomb and blockade one of the poorest and most defenseless countries in the world.

Painful as it may be for Americans to hear, war crimes are being committed with America's support.

Saudi Arabia launched its war on Yemen in 2015 on flimsy national security grounds and almost immediately garnered criticism from the United Nations and human rights groups for indiscriminate bombings, and in some cases deliberate targeting, of civilian areas.

Saudi bombs have landed on residential homes, marketplaces, refugee camps, schools, hospitals, and at least one funeral. In spite of these allegations and clear evidence of extreme human suffering, the United States has supported the Saudi campaign from the beginning by providing refueling assistance, logistical support, intelligence cooperation, and diplomatic cover (not to mention massive arms sales).

To date, conservative estimates put the number of Yemenis killed by Saudi bombs at more than 13,500 (including more than 5,000 confirmed civilians). What has made the situation an order of magnitude worse is Saudi Arabia's de facto blockade of Yemen's air, sea, and land ports, preventing the delivery of much needed humanitarian aid.

The main sewage plant in Yemen's capital Sana'a ran out of fuel, couldn't import more, and hasn't run for months at a time, helping intensify the spread of disease. More than 900,000 Yemenis are suffering from cholera, a disease that could be treated if the Saudis would permit entry of aid and medical supplies.

But, according to the BBC, the Saudis have turned away up to 29 vessels with 300,000 tons of food and 192,000 tons of fuel, plus a UN ship transporting 1,300 tons of health, water, sanitation, hygiene, and nutrition supplies.

About 17 million Yemenis are in urgent need of food; 7 million of those are facing starvation. Roughly 400,000 children under the age of five are suffering from acute malnutrition and, if Yemen doesn't get relief soon, up to 150,000 of those children will likely die within a few months.

Journalists from CBS News, looking to shine a light on what the United Nations has called a “man-made catastrophe,” were recently denied entry into Yemen by Saudi authorities. Riyadh doesn’t want the world to know what it’s doing. CBS instead found Yemenis willing to film the horror, which aired on 60 Minutes this past weekend.

The stomach-churning footage is not easy to watch. David Beasley, who runs the UN’s World Food Program, told *60 Minutes* that, “the Saudi-led coalition” – a phrase he apparently used advisedly to include the United States – “are using food as a weapon of war. And it’s disgraceful.”

Let’s be clear: there is no credible strategic justification for US complicity in this abominable cruelty. The Saudis claim the war is necessary to crush the Houthi militants in Yemen, a group that has received backing from Iran.

Incidentally, Iranian support for the Houthis was negligible until well into the Saudi air campaign, with Iran boosting support largely in response to Riyadh’s offensive. In any case, the war itself has done more to bolster the position of Al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Yemen than to effectively push back against Iranian influence.

But even if that weren’t the case, nothing can justify this kind of brutal collective punishment and excruciating human suffering inflicted on millions of innocent people. Putting hundreds of thousands of children at risk of starvation is an intolerable crime, and only one among many currently being perpetrated.

Shamefully, the issue doesn’t elicit nearly the level of outrage as President Trump’s Twitter feuds and rhetorical attacks on professional athletes. The public indifference is rather shocking. A few members of Congress have spoken out publicly against the savagery in Yemen. Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) has repeatedly made the case for restricting U.S. military support for Saudi operations in Yemen, has called on Riyadh to lift the blockade, and has accused the U.S. of complicity in war crimes.

Senator Rand Paul (R-KY), too, has forcefully condemned U.S. involvement in Saudi crimes. Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA), Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC), and Rep. Mark Pocan (D-WI) have joined the chorus.

And last week the House passed a non-binding resolution declaring U.S. involvement unauthorized. Unfortunately, the executive branch is insulated from these somewhat meager efforts to check and balance.

As Cato’s foreign policy team has said from the beginning, the United States should immediately halt all support to Saudi Arabia and use its influence to allow Yemen the relief it needs. The manner in which the war is being conducted will cast a long shadow over America’s reputation, and undermines Americans’ claim to uphold human rights.

And empowering some of the most violent and extreme elements within Yemen is likely to increase threats to U.S. national security down the road.

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