



## **The US Cannot Bring Peace to Yemen, But It Can End America's Involvement in Yemen's War**

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Two successive U.S. administrations were complicit in war crimes in Yemen. The Saudi royals did the killing, both directly through air strikes and indirectly through a blockade. Tens of thousands of Yemeni civilians have died in more than six years of conflict.

However, America provided, armed, refueled, and serviced Saudi warplanes. Washington also dispensed targeting intelligence, allegedly to diminish civilian casualties by a foreign military which routinely struck weddings, funerals, apartments, markets, and more. The remains of US ordinance litter bombsites across the Yemen. Victims called the conflict the Saudi-American war.

Despite the problems with countries claiming universal jurisdiction over human rights crimes, it would be salutary in this case to end Washington's exemption from accountability. An indictment of both Barack Obama and Donald Trump for crimes against humanity would catch Washington's attention.

To President Joe Biden's credit, he ended the previous blank check for Saudi Arabia's murderous royals. However, though he pledged to treat the regime as a "pariah," he dropped any effort to hold Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman responsible for the gruesome murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Moreover, the president said Washington would still help defend the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia after declaring that he was ending support for offensive Saudi operations. Administration officials pointed to increasingly accurate Yemeni attacks on Saudi targets, such as airports, but these were retaliation for years of offensive Saudi bombing, which continues today. Riyadh wanted to end the war out of desperation, not principle: what was supposed to run six weeks has

exceeded six years, with no end in sight. MbS, as the crown prince is known, finally realized that he had blundered both ostentatiously and disastrously, adding incompetence and criminality to his resume.

He and the rest of the ever-pampered and -sheltered royals appeared surprised when Yemeni insurgents, led by the Ansar Allah movement, or Houthis, returned fire after being attacked. Having enjoyed immunity from all the normal exigencies of life, the Saudi royal family apparently assumed that aggressive war was a royal prerogative as well. Increasing drone and missile attacks on the KSA demonstrated otherwise. All attacks on civilian targets should be deplored, but it is a pleasure to watch high Saudi officials, who had expected to be lionized as the conquerors of Sanaa, whining, whinging, and wailing about unfair Yemeni retaliation. (The US has pitiful taste in allies, often the worst available, as in this case.)

In an effort to end hostilities the US sent special envoy Timothy Lenderking on multiple rounds of the Middle East to press a ceasefire. However, the Houthis are bidding to take Marib, a major city that dominates Yemen's oil-rich region, which would greatly strengthen their bargaining position in any future negotiations.

Of course, the war should end. It is a humanitarian horror for the Yemeni people. And Ansar Allah makes no pretense of respecting human rights or democracy. Amnesty International recently reported: "Since coming to power in 2015, the Houthi de facto authorities have subjected hundreds to arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detention, torture and other-ill treatment, enforced disappearances, unfair trials with recourse to the death penalty as tools of repression to crack down on individuals they perceive as opponents or critics. The Houthis' intolerance towards critics, including journalists, academics and political opposition, extended to religious minorities, namely members of the Baha'i community."

However, the US has no leverage with the Houthis. Washington declared some Ansar Allah leaders to be terrorists, which they decidedly are not—demonstrating yet again that the designation is meaningless, just a political epitaph. It would be more appropriate to label as a terrorist MbS, who has invaded foreign nations, kidnapped foreign leaders, underwritten jihadist insurgents, and turned his nation into a prison state. Anyway, few Houthis hold American bank accounts or plan to vacation in the US, making the penalties meaningless.

Washington also blames Iran, which backed the Yemeni insurgents after they were attacked by the U.S.-Saudi (and Emirati) axis. In this case, America's sanctimonious cant is worse than normal. Tehran is a malign force in the region, but frankly less so than the Kingdom which, with the full backing of the Trump administration, recklessly intervened in Libya, Syria, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Yemen. The latter conflict provided Tehran with a perfect opportunity to bleed the overconfident but underperforming KSA military. Having lavished upon Riyadh the means to kill tens of thousands of Yemeni civilians, Washington cannot credibly complain about Iran's much more modest arms shipments to Ansar Allah.

In fact, the Biden administration's bid to end the Yemeni conflict demonstrates continuing American arrogance: that the US can parachute in and solve problems reaching back decades and more. The underlying fighting has nothing to do with America. There is little Washington can do

to end it, other than urge the combatants to stop. That the administration should continue to, but without illusion or expectation.

Yemen has an ancient history. Its modern existence goes back several decades, with the establishment of the Yemen Arab Republic (or North Yemen) out of the old kingdom in 1962 and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (or South Yemen) in 1967 out of the United Kingdom's Aden Protectorate. They fought each other, united in 1990, and made Ali Abdullah Saleh president; alas, the fighting continued, only within the newly united country.

One of the conflicts was Ansar Allah against Saleh. He was ousted in 2012 as part of the Arab Spring, but three years later joined with his old enemies, the Houthis, to overthrow his successor (and previously his vice president) Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. After which the Saudis and Emiratis organized a coalition of the bought and paid for (including Egypt and Sudan) to invade Yemen and restore to power Hadi, viewed as a reliable factotum by the royals.

The US had nothing to do with any of this. America didn't cause any of it. And there is no reason to believe that Washington could stop it. The US has little relationship with any Yemeni faction. Hadi is nominally the "legitimate" president, but he is discredited, hated by his own people for calling in foreign airstrikes on them, seen as compliant front man for the Saudi royals, and abandoned even by the United Arab Emirates, which began pushing separatist forces in Yemen's south. The conflict is a tragic political miasma about which Washington can do little, other than exit.

America chose to participate in the ongoing Yemeni civil war. The conflict didn't matter in any material sense to Washington. The US was concerned about al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, but Saleh had cooperated with Washington against the terrorist movement and Ansar Allah was equally if not more hostile to AQAP, even while disliking America. Iran's influence always was slight: Unlike Hezbollah, the Houthis never were a proxy of Tehran. Although there was enmity between Ansar Allah, a Shia-offshoot, and the Sunni Kingdom, which had promoted the hateful Wahhabist theology in Yemen, the Houthis were too busy battling internal adversaries to threaten the Saudis.

Thus, the US had no reason to get involved. However, the Obama administration took America into the war as a misguided payoff to the Kingdom, which opposed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran. The idea was to "reassure" the Saudis by supporting their cruel, aggressive war. Then Trump tossed the nuclear pact while doubling down on supporting Riyadh's murderous intervention. So the war continued without America's participation in the JCPOA, the original justification for US involvement.

Although Washington cannot end the underlying conflict, it can halt American participation. And that should extend to halting all support for Saudi Arabia that even indirectly aids the latter's war effort. If Riyadh continues to bomb the Yemeni people, it should be left to face the natural consequences of its aggression. The US has no cause to protect the Saudi royals.

The administration should continue to send American diplomats to crisscross the Middle East advocating peace in Yemen. However, Washington should realize its limitations. The

administration should focus on ending America's involvement in an immoral and counterproductive war. Americans have been accomplices to war crimes. If Riyadh continues to play reckless aggressor, it should bear the full consequences of its crimes.

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