THE U.S. GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO STOP SELLING WEAPONS TO SAUDI ARABIA

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The twenty-first century has been thus far marked by tensions between religion and foreign relations with countries in the Middle East. The political situation in Yemen is fragile at the moment, as they are in the middle of a civil war. At the root of this civil war is political and religious revolution that led to the overthrow of their government. With a long history of religious tensions between certain Middle Eastern nations, countries such as Saudi Arabia felt the need to get involved. The ways in which the kingdom has involved itself through military action has led to the death of many innocent civilians. 7,500 miles away, the United States of America is enabling the death of these Yemenites through their mass military weapons sales to Saudi Arabia. This economic venture must stop immediately.

In 1940, the United States of America established full diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. According to the U.S. Department of State, friendly ties with the Saudi kingdom are extremely important because of their strategic location and immense oil reserves. The Department of State also states that a friendship with Saudi Arabia is important because its leadership is promoting a peaceful and prosperous future for the region. In addition, the American government believes that this Middle Eastern country is a strong partner in regional security and is extremely helpful in counterterrorism efforts by providing military, diplomatic, and financial cooperation.

There are problems with these statements made by the U.S. Department of State. In recent years, Saudi Arabia has become one of the largest American export markets in the Middle East. The main export is military equipment, especially bomber planes. Since 2012, there have been massive weapon sales to the kingdom. But what are these weapons being used for? Saudi Arabia has been using these planes and weapons to bomb Yemen, a country with which the American government has zero issues. In fact, the American government claims that they support the Yemeni government and people. The government also claims that they are providing humanitarian assistance in Yemen. According to the U.S. Department of State, the United States of America have provided nearly thirty-nine million dollars to help Yemen since 2011. This is absolutely absurd. How could the U.S. government keep selling weapons and bomber planes to a country that is bombing and devastating a country, which Americans claim they are helping? The government’s humanitarian aid and support in Yemen will continue to be useless if they do not stop selling weapons to the Saudis.

U.S.-Saudi Relations

In the early 1970s, the U.S. had a special relationship with the Saudi royal family. Saudi Arabia had played an important role in turning African and Middle Eastern countries that supported the Soviet Union into American allies. In the 1980s, the Saudis became great friends of the Reagan administration. In 1985, Secretary of State Richard W. Murphy declared that Saudi Arabia was the “only government in the Arabian Peninsula both friendly to the United States and capable of playing a regional security role”. This type of “special” relationship between the two nations changed at the turn of the twenty-first century. By the mid 2000s, Saudi Arabia lost its ability to influence the price of oil. This could have been caused by the U.S.’ invasion of Iraq in 2003. Several American government officials believed that a larger import of Iraqi oil would put financial pressure on Saudi Arabia and lead the Kingdom to economic and political reform. Since then, the United States has tried to find other cleaner and cheaper alternatives to gas and Saudi Arabia has turned its attention to other markets such as China, India and other Asian countries.

U.S.-Yemen Relations

In 1946, the U.S. recognized the Kingdom of Yemen as a sovereign state. This is when the first diplomatic relations were established with Yemen. In 1962, the United States became one of the first countries to recognize the Yemen Arab Republic. Unfortunately, in 1967, in the wake of the Arab-Israeli conflict, relations started deteriorating. By 1969, the American Embassy in South Yemen was closed. However, four years later, after a visit to Sana’a by Secretary of State William P. Rogers, the United States resumed their diplomatic relationship with the Yemen Arab Republic. Although U.S.-Yemen relations have been rocky, in the past three decades, the U.S. has built a strong and growing partnership with Yemen.

When comparing America’s relationship with Saudi Arabia and its relationship with Yemen, many might say that it is more important to back up the Saudis because of America’s historic friendship with the kingdom. I disagree. Although the U.S. has had a history of strong friendship with Saudi Arabia, this relationship has changed. It is no longer reasonable to say that the Saudi Arabian government has America’s best interests at heart. The United States needs to stop supporting the Saudi monarchy that encourages terrorism and that violates human rights. Instead, it should focus more of its attention on helping Yemen that has recently been a strong ally to the U.S.

Counterterrorism

When it comes to the U.S. Department of State’s claim that Saudi Arabia are active in counterterrorism efforts, there is nothing they could be more wrong about. Let us not forget September 11, 2001. Fifteen of the nineteen hijackers who participated in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were Saudi nationals. Later that year, the American military that was fighting in Afghanistan found out that the Taliban regime was also in fact Saudi. Although some may argue that the acts of these few terrorists should not affect relationships between the American government and the Saudi royal family and government, I beg to differ. Since 9/11, the Saudi government has left the United States aside to pursue their own

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interests. The United States is actually indirectly funding terrorism through their economic relationship with Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabian political analyst and journalist Turki al-Hamad even insists that the religious extremism that the Saudi monarchy propagates “serves as fuel for ISIS”\(^7\). According to the CATO institute, the Saudi government is useless in the fight against terrorism. In fact, the kingdom had been the principal financial backer of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan since 1996. Saudi Arabia has also been sending funds to terrorist groups such as Hamas.

When it comes to Yemen however, they have actually been cooperative with the U.S. in counterterrorism efforts. After the terrorist attacks on 9/11, “the Yemeni Government took practical steps to enhance its intelligence and military cooperation with the United States”.\(^8\) During the next decade, the Yemeni government has done its best to help the United States of America fight against terrorism:

\[\text{[T]he Government of Yemen continued its fight against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, although struggled in this effort in the latter half of the year due to political instability brought on by the armed Houthi movement (...) President Hadi (...) encouraged greater cooperation between U.S. and Yemeni counterterrorism forces.}\] \(^9\)

This report demonstrates that the American and Yemeni governments were able to work together to fight against terrorist groups. Hence, the U.S. needs to stop selling military equipment to Saudi Arabia that is being used against the people of Yemen in order to help their country. The U.S. government should focus their efforts on actually helping the Yemenites getting back on their feet with a stable government. This will be impossible until the American government stops enabling the Saudi bombings in Yemen.

**Human Rights**

The United States should stop selling weapons and bomber planes to Saudi Arabia in order to send a message about the importance of human rights. The American government has a history of supporting human rights throughout the world. By selling weapons to the Saudis, a country that does not respect its people’s freedom, the U.S. is condoning that kind of political regime and ideology. The Second World War could be considered as the beginning of an important link being formed between American foreign policy and the respect of human rights. In the early 1940s, President Franklin Roosevelt declared that the purpose of the United States fighting in World War II was to protect “the four freedoms.” In the late 1970s, President Jimmy Carter pledged to link foreign assistance to the recipient’s country performance in human rights. According to these ideas, the Saudis would not be eligible for American aid, nor to buy American weapons. By the presidency of George H. W. Bush, human rights was but on the backburner. This changed with the election of Bill Clinton. In his rhetoric, Bill Clinton warned the Chinese government that his administration had decided to make human rights an important part of their foreign policy. Since 1993, there has been a positive relationship between aid distribution and respect for human rights. Today, according to the U.S. Department of State:

The protection of fundamental human rights was a foundation

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\(^8\) United States Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism* (2001), 60.

stone in the establishment of the United States over 200 years ago. Since then, a central goal of U.S. foreign policy has been the promotion of respect for human rights, as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.\(^9\)

Since 9/11, Saudi Arabia has been scrutinized on its poor human rights record. There have been many initiatives by the National Society for Human Rights to alter Saudi Arabia’s human rights violations. Unfortunately, none of these initiatives have worked. In fact, since Abdullah took the Saudi throne in 2005, human rights conditions in the kingdom have greatly deteriorated. Although the Saudi government has passed a resolution aimed at making it easier for women to find employment, this policy has never been implemented. Women continue to face injustice in this country. For example, the government provided no legal help for women who want to get married against their father’s will or who want to open up a bank account without a consenting male guardian. The lack of policies in place makes it impossible for a woman with an abusive guardian to break free. Life in Saudi Arabia is also bad for children.\(^10\) The government officials assume that children can be sentenced to capital punishment, if they appear to exhibit physical signs of puberty during the time the crime was committed. In 2007, a boy who was only thirteen years old at the time of his alleged crime was executed. Recently, a young Saudi Arabian blogger and activist for reform named Raif Badawi was charged with apostasy and was sentenced to ten years in jail and one thousand lashes. This particular story has been all over the news and has truly captured international attention. Atrocities such as these happen very often in Saudi Arabia. Even though the country puts up a front and speaks to the American government about their plans to foster positive human rights, progress is not quick enough.

The United States is clearly not blind to these violations of human rights. In the 2006 U.S. Record, in the section about Saudi Arabia, the government reported “US officials frequently urged the government to promote political participation, transparency, accountability in government, religious freedom, and rights for women and workers”.\(^12\) This means that the American government knows that something has to be done about the situation in the kingdom, but still, with all of this injustice happening in Saudi Arabia, the U.S. keeps funding them by buying their oil and selling them weapons. This absolutely absurd! For a country like the United States that takes so much pride in its encouragement of human rights, it is crazy to see that they continue to fund and support such a cruel government. Clearly, promoting peace and human rights through discussion and diplomacy with the Saudi government is not working. The U.S. should completely stop selling weapons and military equipment to the kingdom until they make substantial improvements in the human rights of their people.

The situation is quite different in Yemen. Although the country is presently going through a devastating civil war, the government does have legislation in place to protect its people. In Yemen, “Laws governing trial procedures apply to all citizens. The law considers defendants innocent until proven guilty”.\(^13\)


\(^12\) United States Department of State, Supporting Human Rights and Democracy (2006), 175.

\(^13\) United States Department of State, Supporting Human Rights and Democracy (2006), 175.
Yemen has institutions and laws in place to insure the security of their people’s human rights, the civil war has taken over and has taken the human rights of the Yemenites away. This means that in order to allow the Yemenites to reassume their human rights, the U.S. government needs to stop supplying the Saudi Arabians with military equipment because the Saudi intervention is just making the civil war more devastating and dangerous.

**Attacks on Yemen**

Not only is the Saudi government unjust to its own people by disrespecting human rights, it is also committing war crimes in Yemen. The Saudi-led coalition has been intervening in Yemen since 2015 in order to influence the outcome of the Yemeni Civil War. In March 2015, the military coalition led by the Saudis has launched an air campaign. They have been bombing innocent civilians since then. According to the UN, over three thousand civilians have been killed in Yemen over the course of this conflict. When the civilians look up to the sky to look at what is dropping those bombs, they see American bomber planes. The Saudi government keeps claiming that only military targets have been hit by airstrikes, yet the evidence on the ground shows a very different story. The military coalition has failed to protect civilians by targeting schools, hospitals, markets and mosques. The Saudis have clearly violated international humanitarian law in Yemen. During the last decade, the U.S. has sold over 100 billion dollars worth of military equipment to Saudi Arabia. 14 How could a government that claims to be supporters of peace and international law continue to sell weapons to a country like Saudi Arabia that keeps violating international humanitarian law and killing thousands of innocent people? This must stop. The U.S. Department of State claims that their “aid is also focused on partnering with the Yemeni government to meet the critical needs of its citizens”. 15 This statement is extremely hypocritical. The American government needs to seriously reconsider what they are condoning and enabling through this economic alliance with the Saudis.

The United States of America need to stop selling military equipment to Saudi Arabia. The U.S. was founded upon the values of liberty. In history, America has been a strong supporter and defender of human rights and has advocated against regimes that violated those rights. If the United States is as devoted to human rights as they claim, then why are they still selling arms on a massive scale to Saudi Arabia? The kingdom has a very bad record of human rights. Women and children especially are left with little to no rights under the Saudi government. Moreover, Saudi Arabia is using American military equipment to conduct airstrikes on innocent Yemenites, targeting schools, hospitals, mosques and markets. Also, Saudi Arabia has been funding many terrorist groups; groups that the United States are actively fighting against. By selling arms to Saudi Arabia and by buying their oil, the U.S. is indirectly funding their own terrorist enemies. The United States of America need to send a strong message to the Saudi government by stopping these weapon sales and cutting ties with the kingdom until they stop bombing innocent Yemenites and actively start progressing when it comes to human rights.

**Bibliography**

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