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Shameless Coalition Propaganda and the War on Yemen

By Daniel Larison
March 3, 2017

The Wall Street Journal gives ^[1] the UAE's ambassador a platform to recite the Saudi-led coalition's propaganda:

Checking Iranian aggression will not be easy, but the stability of the region depends upon it. Holding the country to its commitments would be an important first step. Rebuilding America's ties to its traditional partners in the region would be another. So too would be directly confronting Iranian interference in places like Yemen.

The op-ed is typical for a representative of one of the governments currently destroying Yemen: it grossly exaggerates Iran's role, portrays the coalition as defenders of "stability" when they have been among the worst destabilizers, blames Iran for the humanitarian crisis for which the coalition bears most of the responsibility, and casts Iran's minimal involvement as "aggression" while whitewashing the coalition's invasion and bombardment of another country. Most of the ambassador's claims are false or wildly misleading. Consider this laughable statement:

The effort in Yemen demonstrates that the U.A.E. and other Arab Gulf states are taking the lead to protect not only our own interests, but also American ones.

It is debatable whether the interests of the Gulf states are served by getting bogged down in an ill-advised war they can't win, but it is certain that U.S. interests have been harmed by their

“effort.” Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has been greatly strengthened by the Saudi-led intervention, and the coalition has sometimes made common cause with AQAP. Insofar as the U.S. has any interests at stake there, they are being undermined by a war that gives priority to fighting people that have never been our enemies while allowing hostile groups to flourish. The U.S. has stupidly made itself complicit in their war, but that doesn’t alter the reality that the Saudi-led war has been damaging to U.S. interests, and it is an insulting lie to claim otherwise.

The coalition’s desperation to deflect blame for the destruction of Yemen is impossible to miss. This was an extraordinary bit of misdirection:

Meanwhile, Iran has steadily escalated its support for the Houthis, prolonging a war that has had horrible humanitarian consequences and distracted from the fight against al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, one of the world’s most dangerous terrorist franchises.

Iran’s support for the Houthis remains negligible, and the Houthis haven’t been and still aren’t their proxy ^[2]. The conflict has been intensified and prolonged because the Saudis and their allies attacked two years ago, blockaded the country, and systematically wrecked ^[3] Yemen’s infrastructure and economy. Had they not done so, the war would not have been as severe, and humanitarian conditions would not be nearly as bad. The war has distracted from the fight against AQAP, but the coalition is largely to blame for that. It is the coalition’s determination to focus their efforts on the Houthis while mostly ignoring AQAP that has allowed the latter to become stronger. The ambassador takes the consequences of the coalition’s reckless intervention and lamely tries to pin it on a government that isn’t involved in the fighting. Unfortunately, this upside-down version of events is one that is readily accepted here in the U.S., because it allows our political leaders to pretend that our government’s enabling of the Saudi-led war on Yemen is something other than the ongoing disgrace and indefensible blunder that it is.

The UAE ambassador wants the U.S. to increase its support for that indefensible war, and there is a very real possibility that the Trump administration will do just that. Regardless, it is important to understand that increased U.S. involvement will only make the conflict worse, and no American interests will be served by it. The coalition governments have based their intervention on the lie that they are combating Iranian influence, but there is scarcely any such influence to combat. All they are really doing is destroying a poor neighboring country in the name of reimposing a widely-hated, discredited leader, and we should not be helping them commit their outrages on the people of Yemen.