

# افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد  
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

By Jean Shaoul  
27.08.2019

## ***Britain sold more than £6 billion in arms for Saudi-led coalition's deadly war in Yemen***

The British government, by supplying arms, personnel and expertise, has played a crucial role in the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen.

The coalition has been accused of hundreds of indiscriminate bombing operations against civilians since the start of the war in March 2015.

Saudi Arabia assembled a coalition to reinstate President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, whom Riyadh and Washington had installed after widespread protests forced the resignation of long-term dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011-12, after Houthi rebels drove out his corrupt government.

The coalition has the full backing of both Washington and London. In addition to Saudi Arabia it consists of Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain and the Academi corporation, formerly known as Blackwater. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Morocco were coalition members but pulled out earlier this year. The support of Qatar for the coalition was suspended in 2017.

Britain has licensed the sale of at least £6.2 billion (\$7.6 billion) worth of arms to the coalition, selling £5.3 billion of arms to Saudi Arabia, including £2.7 billion (\$3.4 billion) worth of aircraft and £1.9 billion (\$2.4 billion) worth of missiles, bombs and grenades, £657 million to the UAE, £85 million to Egypt, £72 million to Bahrain, £40 million to Kuwait and £142 million to Qatar, before it withdrew from the coalition.

But the real level of arms sales is probably much higher, as many are transferred under the opaque system of “Open Licences” that is used to sanction arms sales to blood-soaked regimes in the Middle East, such as el-Sisi’s in Egypt and the barbaric House of Saud. According to *Middle East Eye*, there has been a 22 percent rise in the use of secretive open licences since ministers pledged to increase Britain’s arms exports after the Brexit vote.

As well as supplying arms, Britain has sent more than 80 Royal Air Force personnel to Saudi Arabia, some working within the command and control centre that selects targets in Yemen for bombing and others training the Saudi air force. A further 6,200 British contractors work at Saudi military bases, training pilots and maintaining aircraft.

It also emerged that—unbeknownst to the UK population—there are British troops on the ground in Yemen. The *Mail on Sunday* reported in March that at least five British Special Forces commandos had been wounded in gun battles as part of a top-secret UK military campaign in Yemen.

The troops from the elite Special Boat Service (SBS), whose activities are never reported to Parliament, suffered gunshot injuries in fierce clashes with Houthi forces in the Sa’dah area of northern Yemen, where up to 30 British troops are based. British Special Forces are thus fighting on the same side as jihadis and militia linked to al-Qaeda that are part of the Saudi-led coalition and use child soldiers as young as 13 and 14 years old.

Earlier this month, it was revealed that last year Prime Minister Boris Johnson—then foreign secretary—had expressed his approval of the export of weapons systems to Saudi Arabia in the expectation they would be used in Yemen. Johnson also supported sending British troops to Yemen to take control of the port of al-Hodeidah, the main entry port for food entering the war-torn country. According to government officials, now that Johnson has become prime minister, that option “remains very much on the table.”

Last week, a United Nations panel of experts reported it had found fragments of British-made laser guidance missile systems used at an air raid site in Yemen, in a strike in September 2016 that it concluded breached international humanitarian law (IHL). The panel also found missile parts from the same British factory at the Alsonidar complex following a second air strike nine days later, where a water pump factory and a former tube maker were located.

These and other British-built aircraft, bombs and missiles have been used to target civilians in breach of UK arms export law that bans the sale of arms or munitions to a state that is at “clear risk” of committing serious violations of IHL. Yet according to the

Ministry of Defence's own data, the number of alleged IHL violations by the Saudi-led coalition had reached a staggering 350 by March 2018.

The war has created the worst humanitarian crisis on the planet in what was already the poorest country in the Arab world. Air strikes and other combat operations have caused the deaths of some 80,000 people, including at least 17,700 civilians. Millions of Yemenis are dependent upon food aid programmes, with at least 3.2 million people needing treatment for acute malnutrition, including 2 million children under the age of five. According to the Save the Children charity, as many as 85,000 children under the age of five have died from hunger and disease.

Last week, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said it would have to close its food aid programme to 12 million and health services to 19 million because both the UAE and Saudi Arabia—the main donors—had failed to honour their combined pledges of \$1.5 billion, made last February, exposing yet more Yemenis to hunger and disease.

Andrew Smith of the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT), speaking about Britain's role in this catastrophe, said, "Thousands of people have been killed in the Saudi-led bombardment of Yemen, but that has done nothing to deter the arms dealers. The bombing has created the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, and it wouldn't have been possible without the complicity and support of Downing Street. These arms sales are immoral and illegal."

Last June, in a case brought by CAAT, Britain's Court of Appeal ordered the government to suspend the issuing of new licences for arms sales to Saudi Arabia and re-take decisions on current licences. It ruled that the government had failed to assess whether British-supplied weapons would be used in Riyadh's murderous war in Yemen, now in its fifth year, against civilians in breach of both international humanitarian law and Britain's own laws.

Crucially, it confirmed that the British government had sought to evade international law, including a 2014 European treaty on arms sales, by selling arms knowing they would be used in war crimes. The UK did this with the simple expedient of failing to record whether or not any suspected violations had occurred.

Yet, in spite of all the evidence showing that Saudi Arabia flouts international law at home and abroad—most recently ordering the assassination and dismemberment of Saudi dissident Jamal Kashoggi—the government's counsel, James Eadie QC, even tried to

argue that Saudi Arabia is “not a state flagrantly and wantonly violating IHL [international humanitarian law]. It knows the eyes of the world are on it.”

The government is to appeal the Court’s ruling and is seeking to continue sales under pre-existing agreements. It has invited a Saudi delegation to its bi-annual Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) arms fair in London’s Docklands, organised by the government’s arms sales unit Defence & Security Organisation (DSO) and Clarion Events, which boast of its “unrivalled scale.”

Speaking with all the shameless lies and hypocrisy that the British ruling class has long practiced, a government spokesperson said, “The government undertakes a stringent process of scrutiny and approval before issuing any formal invitations to foreign governments to attend a major UK defence exhibition like DSEI.”

The DSEI lists the UAE as an “international partner” on its website, which states the state-owned Saudi Arabian Military Industries firm will also be exhibiting at the fair.

Two weeks ago, the Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) and UK law firm Bindmans submitted a 288-page report to Liz Truss, the international trade secretary, responsible for approving arms sales, and the parliamentary committee on arms export controls.

It details the way that the Saudi-led coalition had covered up evidence of its flagrant breaches of international humanitarian law. It documents the most comprehensive analysis of the Saudi bombing campaign, largely compiled by Mwatana, an independent Yemeni human rights group, and contains testimonies by eyewitnesses and forensic analysis of scores of air strikes carried out by the coalition. It directly contradicts the post-strike investigations conducted much later by the Saudi-led coalition. It says the attacks appear to violate international humanitarian law by “targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure.”

Arron Merat, a journalist and House of Commons researcher, said “This evidence shows not only that Riyadh is targeting Yemeni civilians but that it is covering them up with whitewash ‘investigations.’” He added, “What’s worse is that the British government says that it bases its decisions on whether or not to approve arms sales to Saudi Arabia on information provided to it by Saudi Arabia.”

*The author recommends:*

**Saudi attack on hospital kills eight as war in Yemen enters fifth year** [28 March 2019]

***26 August 2019***