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<http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/10/08/why-is-the-us-is-aiding-and-enabling-saudi-arabias-genocidal-war-in-yemen/print/>

## Why is the US is Aiding and Enabling Saudi Arabia's Genocidal War in Yemen?

By Michael Horton  
October 8, 2015



The humanitarian crisis in Yemen rivals the crisis in Syria. After six months of war and the imposition of a naval blockade designed to starve the country into submission, 90% of Yemen's population of more than 24 million are in urgent need of humanitarian aid. More than 6000

people, nearly 90% of which are civilians, are dead and most of Yemen's already limited infrastructure is in ruins. Sana'a, the capital of Yemen and home to 3 million, is under continuous aerial bombardment by Saudi Arabia and its partners who have targeted schools, hospitals, and homes in densely populated urban areas.

The US, along with the UK, is providing intelligence and logistical support to Saudi Arabia and its partners. Both countries are also supplying Saudi Arabia with weapons. The US is equipping the Saudis with internationally banned cluster munitions which now litter large swaths of the Yemeni countryside where they will kill and maim for years to come.

Beyond arms manufacturers, the only real beneficiary of this bloody war are takfiri groups like al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State (IS) which is making inroads in Yemen.

So why is the US supporting a war that has achieved little beyond further empowering groups like AQAP and IS?

Yemen and its people are being offered up as a kind of sacrifice for Saudi Arabia's and the Gulf Cooperation Council's support for the nuclear arms deal with Iran. Most importantly US support for Saudi Arabia's war has ensured a steady stream of new weapons orders. US-based arms manufacturers have sold 8 billion USD worth of weapons to Saudi Arabia since it launched 'Operation Decisive Storm' six months ago. This is a figure that adds almost ten percent to the 90.4 billion USD worth of weapons that US arms manufacturers have sold to Saudi Arabia since President Obama was elected.

In exchange for tepid Saudi support for the nuclear arms deal with Iran—support that the US does not need given that both Russia and China back the deal—and billions of dollars in weapons sales, the US has turned a blind eye to what can only be called state sanctioned genocide in Yemen. US support for Saudi Arabia's disastrous war in Yemen is likely to have profound and lasting consequences for not only Yemen but also for the region, and in particular for Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi led war in Yemen was launched on the pretense of re-installing the exiled government of Yemeni President Hadi. The real aim of the war is to destroy Yemen's Houthi Shi'a rebels which Saudi Arabia views as Iranian proxies. The Houthis are Zaidi Shi'a, a sect which is doctrinally closer to Sunnis than Iran's Twelver Shi'a. The Houthi movement is deeply rooted in the socio-cultural context of north-west Yemen and while it undoubtedly has a relationship with Iran, it has never been—and likely never will be—an Iranian proxy. The Houthi movement and its leadership are fiercely independent.

Saudi Arabia's fears about growing Iranian influence in the region have led it and its partners into a war that will consume their blood and treasure for years to come thereby guaranteeing years of healthy profits for US and British arms manufacturers. Yemen's mountainous terrain and complex political landscape rival those of Afghanistan. The Houthis, while at the other end of the religious spectrum, are comparable to Afghanistan's Taliban in terms of their capabilities as guerilla fighters. In many respects, they are superior.

The Houthis will not be defeated by an aerial campaign and a limited number of ground troops. Neither Saudi Arabia nor its partners have the capability to deploy and sustain the thousands of troops that it will take to defeat the Houthis and their allies. Nor do they have enough political capital to absorb what would be an extremely high casualty rate for their soldiers. In 1962, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser sent troops into Yemen for what he thought would be a quick victory over Royalist forces fighting for the Zaidi Imam who ruled north Yemen. By 1967, at least fifteen thousand Egyptian soldiers had been killed in Yemen.

By enabling Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, the US is not only ensuring the destruction of Yemen and the empowerment of AQAP and IS, it could also be inadvertently further tipping the balance of power in the Middle East in favor of Iran. The government of Iran can only be delighted as it watches Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates plunge ever deeper into the quagmire that is Yemen. The war, which, if negotiations are not pursued, could go on for years, will only weaken the governments of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. During a period in which oil prices are low and may head lower, both governments will be forced to pour billions of dollars into a war that will have no victors beyond groups like AQAP and IS—both of which will—and have—targeted the Gulf monarchies that now view them as useful proxies.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, the war has already spread across its long, rugged, and largely unguarded border with Yemen. Houthi fighters and Yemeni Army units allied with them have launched numerous successful attacks on Saudi border posts. For short periods, Saudi Armed Forces have lost control of towns and villages in the Saudi provinces of Jizan and Najran due to Houthi incursions.

Most seriously for Saudi Arabia, there are rumblings of discontent in the House of Saud with King Salman and his son and defense minister Muhammad bin Salman. Muhammad bin Salman—who at age 30 is the youngest and least experienced defense minister in the world—has broken with a foreign policy that has long been cautious and careful. The young defense minister who is also second in line to the throne is viewed by many members of the House of Saud as reckless. As Saudi Arabia is drawn deeper into what could well be its Vietnam, discontent with the current leadership will undoubtedly increase.

US support for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen has led to the deaths of thousands of civilians and helped erase fifty years of progress in Yemen. As the war grinds on for what could be years, it will produce blowback as significant as that generated by the US' own ill-conceived invasion of Iraq which altered the balance of power in the Middle East and ultimately spawned the Islamic State. This is undoubtedly welcome news for arms manufacturers.