

Open Statement on Yemen

November 11, 2018

We write to urge an end to U.S. support for the war in Yemen, now home to the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe.

We do not come at this issue as bystanders. We write as former policymakers, diplomats, intelligence professionals, and others who worked on these issues in the previous administration—some directly, others less so—when the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen began. We did not intend U.S. support to the coalition to become a blank check. But today, as civilian casualties have continued to rise and there is no end to the conflict in sight, it is clear that is precisely what happened. Given this reality, the United States should end participation in or any form of support for this conflict, beyond humanitarian assistance for the Yemeni people. It is past time for America's role in this disastrous war in Yemen to end.

The Obama administration provided some intelligence, refueling, and logistical assistance to the Saudi-led coalition, in response to a legitimate threat posed by missiles on the Saudi border and the Houthi overthrow of the Yemeni government, with support from Iran. We also did so in an effort to gain leverage to push the coalition to abide by international humanitarian law and support parallel diplomatic efforts. Unfortunately, our approach did not succeed in limiting and ultimately ending the war. However, rather than learning from that failure, the Trump administration has doubled down on support for the Saudi leadership's prosecution of the war, while removing restrictions we had put in place.

The results have been devastating. Civilian casualties have skyrocketed, climbing 164 percent between June and September of this year alone. Deadly strikes on civilians have continued, including on markets, weddings, and school buses. By blockading the port city of Hodeidah, the coalition exacerbated the humanitarian crisis by preventing critical food and medical supplies from reaching the Yemeni people. The UN has warned of mass starvation as famine threatens up to 14 million people. Rather than remain complicit in the world's worst humanitarian crisis, the United States should be leading the world in demanding access and providing humanitarian assistance.

And yet, in September, Secretary Pompeo formally announced that the United States would continue to support the coalition in light of "demonstrable actions to reduce the risk of harm to civilians... resulting from military operations..." Little could be farther from the truth, and in making this determination Pompeo reportedly overruled professionals in the State Department. They recognize, as we do, that the time has come for us to end our support for and involvement in this brutal conflict, and to throw our efforts squarely behind a diplomatic solution, including through the work of Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and the UN-led peace process.

We welcome Secretary Mattis' announcement that the United States will no longer conduct in-flight refueling for the coalition as well as recent statements calling for a reduction in violence and backing the Special Envoy's efforts. But they should be accompanied by more comprehensive action, namely a suspension of all U.S. support for the campaign in Yemen, a clear demand for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire, and increased U.S. investment in the high-level diplomacy needed to end this war.

The war in Yemen is a full-blown crisis. We unsuccessfully tried conditional support to the coalition. This administration has demonstrated the folly of unconditional support.

Now, we must cease support altogether.

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